

# STRIPTease: An investigation of curatorial practices for fashion in the museum

A project submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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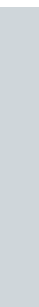
## DECLARATION

I certify that except where due acknowledgement has been made, the work is that of the author alone; the work has not been submitted previously, in whole or part, to qualify for any other academic award; the content of the exegesis is the result of work which has been carried out since the official commencement date of the approved research program; and, any editorial work, paid or unpaid, carried out by a third party is acknowledged.

Robyn Healy

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*What still dignity dwells in a suit of Cast Clothes! How meekly it bears its honours! No haughty looks, no scornful gesture: silent and serene, it fronts the world; neither demanding worship, nor afraid to miss it.*

Thomas Carlyle Sartor Resartus 1838 (1965, p. 181)

## SUMMARY:

This research project investigates models of curatorial practice for fashion. The study centres upon questions of what is represented and what is missing in the museum experience of fashion. Typically, the museum system is understood as one of ordered arrangement and selection. But in this project I appropriate the burlesque act of striptease as both metaphor and parody for critique of fashionable clothing within the conditions of the museological setting. The act of taking off clothes, removing garments from a body, the falling away of things from fixed arrangements, is a process I apply to curatorial practice for revealing the actions of fashion through the familiar ritual of dressing.

The study is founded upon the Western conceptions of clothes and fashion as put forward in the writings of Thomas Carlyle and Roland Barthes. These 'fashion theorists' emphasise a sense of 'worldliness' that suggest participation in fashion occurs through the everyday practices of dressing/wear and associated social networks. In the curating of two exhibitions for the project, and in this text, I begin to test these ideas about consumption and circulation of fashion as articulated by the appearances of 'new' or 'used' clothes.

From these findings and my studies in the field, I present the experience and meanings connected to dressing detail and to diversity of appearance as a way of curating the fashion experience without wearing clothes or setting garments in motion. In my conclusion, I argue that the discoveries made during the research propose that the curation of dressing gestures and transformational states can convey a language of fashion rarely explored in current museum practices.

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STRIPTease

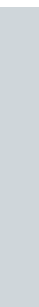
THRILLER

IN TATTERS

FASHION STRIPPED BARE

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## UNDRESSING: INTRODUCTION

My intention in the research was to 'undress' the fashion exhibition and through this speculate about new models for curating fashion. Through this stripping back of customary practices I studied the set of conditions surrounding the display of fashion from appearance, arrangement and atmosphere to habits of use. My intention was to provoke the customary museological response to consumption and circulation of fashion as it has been suggested though the display of clothing in the conventional exhibition mode. I did this through curating a series of 'dressing' interventions and thereby pushed the parameters of museum conditions. I played with the routine display environment by evoking less-regulated fashion manifestations, and sought surroundings that induced more intimate and everyday fashion encounters. As the basis of the study I engaged with public collections, as this enabled me to interact with both museum surrounds and the community.

I found the activities of fashion as suggested through gestures of dressing or wear offered a tactic to curate fashion experienced through clothing as a social object (Stafford 2006). By experimenting with the display conditions of the fashion exhibition I introduced the dynamic of participatory experiences, as conveyed by habits of use and patterns of consumption, in order to research fashion through the practices of wear.

In this way I reviewed both my practice and the exhibition model. I introduced into my practice a range of collaborative and participatory methods that communicated elements of chance, misadventure and the unknown, to unsettle and steer the project along less prescriptive paths. Through the curation of two exhibitions I sought to make clear the connections to social networks suggested by wearing fashion.

The project title, *Striptease*, was chosen to frame the research. It reveals the research process, as I progressively undressed customary practices. In the exhibition projects, the act of taking off clothes was a way of questioning states of appearance and changing fashion environments in both material and theoretical ways. The undressing process was designed to critique the actions of fashion associated with the dressed state. In this 'undressing', I tested fashion environments for display and participated with varied clothing conditions.

Through this process of gradual dismantling, I studied and challenged the institutional models that I was familiar with. Seeking to reveal and build on my practice invited diverse readings of and curatorial experiments with the fashion exhibition.

While the project explored fashion and exhibition environments, I was not attempting to produce a compilation of curatorial practice in the fashion field or to plot the development of public fashion collections, even though this material informs the study and imparted vital case studies. I intentionally moved away from the museum experience where fashion is encountered via rows of dressed mannequins. Instead, I suggested conveying fashion through a diversity of clothing conditions. The research opened up ways to study fashion through dressing. This research direction looked at how clothes were worn and how the wear of clothes is an expression of fashion and connectedness to life or 'worldliness' in the museum condition. In this way the research studied the nature of representational form, and contributed towards expanding the experiences of fashion in the museum. The exhibition model became a site to research both the nature and material form of fashion. Through displaying the activities of fashion from the circulation and consumption of clothes I studied social networks of wear and critiqued the appearances and experiences of the exhibition mode.

The durable visual record reveals the two exhibitions and the speculations that have occurred over the course of the project. I have dismantled the durable visual record into four sections or strips. This first section presents an introduction to the research paradigm and overview of the projects. In section 2, 'Thriller', and section 3, 'In tatters', I set up the display condition for each exhibition. The text sets the research within fashion scholarship by positioning the project exhibitions between key theoretical texts and curatorial and contemporary design practices in the field. Each section integrates illustrations within the text, which expose the project exhibitions and other key works referenced in the research process. A slideshow was also created for each exhibition. In the final section, 'Fashion stripped bare', I offer some conclusions about the project outcomes, reflections about my practice and the new theorisations behind my enquiry.

A designer and exhibition index is placed before the bibliography to trace the various design practices and curatorial events that informed this study and which are mentioned in the text.



## RESEARCH QUESTION

I started this project aiming to extend the appearance and surroundings of the fashion exhibition. I intended to address how the complexity of fashion was conveyed in the display condition. Through the fine art institutions where I had curated, I was familiar with particular exhibition experiences that represented fashion within mannered clothing groupings, dressed on mannequins and situated within chronological, technical, stylistic or designer frameworks. In this research I sought to express diverse clothing encounters and set about expanding the curatorial environments of fashion outside such ordered systems and regulative practices.

I conceived one major question to challenge and undress the relationships between fashion and the museum:

*What is represented and what is missing from the curatorial practices for the display and interpretation of fashion posed by the museum exhibition?*

## SITUATING THE RESEARCH

The research has involved a number of areas of activity:

- *dismantled*, review of my past practice
- *dressed*, review of fashion curation and emergent practices
- *worn*, review of key texts by Thomas Carlyle and Roland Barthes suggesting an exhibition model responsive to 'wear'
- *undressed*, overview of the two exhibitions curated for the project
- *dressed up*, reflection on fancy dress, performative and participatory practices, as an extension of my curatorial practice



# 1.01

*The new dressing: Japanese fashion of the 80s*  
1987, National Gallery of Australia,  
Drill Hall, Canberra

## DISMANTLED: EXHIBITIONS FROM 1985 TO NOW

The project emerges from my own experience as a curator of fashion over 25 years.<sup>i</sup> When I started curating fashion there was only a small group of museums with fashion collections or regular exhibition programs. Fashion suited the collection policies of major fine art museums through alignment with artistic practice and selection of unique design models.<sup>ii</sup> Over the last 25 years, the increased presence of fashion in museums worldwide has generated debate about curatorial modes and the understanding of fashion projected by these modes. Many still find the idea of the fashion exhibition itself a contentious proposition. Critics like Deyan Sudjic opposed the rising profile of fashion in the art museum:

Fashion is the perfect cultural form for the severely limited attention spans of our times and it is expanding to fill a vacuum left by the shriveling of interest in older art forms. Fashion suits our restricted tastes. And pushing fashion into the cultural landscape has become part of the business strategies of the conglomerates, which are continually strengthening their grip on the fashion industry. It makes clothes appear to matter. It makes clothes talked about. . . . Fashion has the ability to press all the buttons of contemporary life. And it is this convergence between high culture and popular art that gives fashion its power. It can address serious issues, but it's also got an eye on the mainstream.

(Sudjic 2001, para. 8, para. 9).

Sudjic's comments profiled the complexities inherent in museum representation of fashion. For fashion is not a simple collection proposition. In reviewing the museum response to fashion I suggest there are complex



**1.02**

*Dressed to the eyes: the fashions of Hall Ludlow*  
2005, RMIT Gallery, Melbourne

relationships operating in an exhibition of clothes produced by states of embodiment, display appearance, circulation and consumption cycles. The exhibition mode creates curious tensions between appearance and reality, spectacle and use, fetishism and worldliness. In the collection and display of fashion there has been ambiguity and irony in the representation of the ephemeral (Debo 2002, Palmer 2008a) and in how the dynamic of constant change and the 'dated' was encountered.

## EMERGENT DIALOGUES

Over the last ten years I have noticed increasing reflection on and discussion about curatorial approaches to fashion in the museum. The emergence in 1997 of the publication *Fashion Theory: The Journal of Dress, Body and Culture*, edited by Valerie Steele, Director of New York's Fashion Institute of Technology (FIT), has stimulated and contributed to debate in the field. The journal has provided a forum for curators to position exhibition scholarship and to share practices relating to material culture and community experience. Three special issues of *Fashion Theory*, 'Methodology' in 1998 (Breward 1998; Ribeiro 1998; Steele 1998; Taylor 1998) and 'Exhibitionism' (Breward 2008; McNeil 2008; Mears 2008; Palmer 2008a; Palmer 2008b; Steele 2008) and 'Fashion curation' in 2008 (Beard 2008; de la Haye & Clark 2008; Frisa 2008; McNeil 2008; Stevenson 2008) have shaped and summarised major debates in the field. These issues documented emergent dialogues in research methods and museum ideologies, from the rise of the new museology to multidisciplinary practices in the academy (Breward 2008; Cumming 2004; Taylor 2002). Expansion in the field has included an MA program for the discipline of curating at the London College of Fashion, launched in 2005 and led by curators Amy de la Haye and Judith Clark. In contrast, recent publications of fashion histories documenting the rise of public fashion collections and exhibition dissemination (Cumming 2004; Loppa 2002; Steele 2005; Taylor 2002) have conversed with curatorial precedents and new directions. The 'Making an appearance: fashion, dress and consumption' conference hosted by the Centre for Critical

and Cultural Studies, University of Queensland, and the Queensland University of Technology (QUT) (Craik 1994; Maynard 2004) was the first academic forum for fashion held in Australia. The conference surveyed Australian scholarship in the field; keynote speakers included international academics cited in this review, Elizabeth Wilson, Christopher Breward and Valerie Steele.

The advent of prominent fashion cultural events has created further exhibition and critical space in the field. This corresponds with models formed in other artistic and design communities to profile new practices. Cultural events like the 1996 Florence Fashion Biennale *Looking at Fashion* (Celant 1996) and Antwerp's *Mode 2001landed* (Van Beirendonck & Derycke 2001) enlisted multidisciplinary practices and made artistic and scholarly connections to fashion outside standard commercial activities. I found an influential model for my own practice in the Antwerp-based *A magazine*, launched in 2001. Each edition is curated by a fashion designer or house, who assemble together personal yet quite persuasive conversations about the aesthetic and cultural values of fashion. The magazine uses a large number of visual essays and short texts to delve into the poetics and sensibility of fashion, a dimension I sought to explore in my own curatorial practice.

## MUSEUM ENVIRONMENTS

Major museum expansions around the world, including in Australia, have witnessed the increasing complexity and conspicuousness of the museum design (Barker 1999). In the last ten years I have experienced the rapid expansion of the fashion environment in the museum.

No longer does the museum provide a quiet contemplative encounter. The contemporary fashion exhibition is a saturated multimedia environment composed of various elements from sound, electronic imagery, digital interfaces and computer-based interactives. *blog.mode: addressing fashion*, held in the Costume Institute of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 2007, for instance, included computer terminals for community bloggers to post comments about works on display. In the shifting form of the museum, Anderson (2000) argued that the fashion exhibition aligned with particular cultural associations, areas of entertainment, celebrity, status,

morality, consumerism, sexuality and image. However, for Mary Tannen the atmosphere of the exhibition set fashion apart from the usual contemplation reserved for art forms:

On a Friday evening in March at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the galleries of Egyptian art were as silent as King Tut's tomb. But one floor down, where the jeweled white suit of another king — Elvis — held pride of place in the Costume Institute's 'Rock Style' show, the joint was jumping ... Fashion, a hit on MTV, is now prime time in the art scene.

(Tannen 2000, first para., third para.)

Over the period 1998 to 2001 I had the opportunity to review the display environment for fashion in the production of two new gallery spaces. I participated in the major museum development for the National Gallery of Victoria, as part of the senior curatorial team.<sup>iii</sup> The existing National Gallery of Victoria building was renovated for the international collections and a new museum was built for housing the Australian collections. The design and selection of exhibition elements like glass show cases, mannequins, didactic information and technologies started my reflections about the condition of display. Here, my responses to architectural briefs inquired into the curation of the museum surroundings. For instance, the non-rectangular showcases designed for the Australian collections by Lab architecture studio<sup>iv</sup> in association with Bates Smart Melbourne and the German manufacturer Glasbau-Hahn created a flexible space. The showcases, based on the form of an ancient Chinese tangram puzzle, enabled multiple configurations and viewings (Gregory & West-More 2003). They were conceived as a dynamic mechanism to move away from permanent-style structures toward the nomadic. In 2000 I travelled to international museums in London, Paris, Edinburgh, Glasgow, New York, Philadelphia and Los Angeles to study new technologies for museum environments. The fusion of imagery, sound and access to information generated through multimedia technologies articulated the new fashion media. Alice Beard noted the pioneering fashion website SHOWstudio, launched in 2000, as an example of the emergent technologies that networked the fashion community and curated an inclusive creative process (Beard 2008, p. 182). In the redevelopment of the National Gallery of Victoria, International, by the Italian

architectural firm of Mario Bellini with Métier 3,<sup>v</sup> I looked at ways to converse with the new fashion community who now had access to vast repositories of fashion on the internet and were literate with lush multimedia imagery.

## EXHIBITION NARRATIVES

The culture of the museum (Barker 1999; Bennett 1995; Pearce 1993; Shelton 2006) has steered the display condition. The museum is an organisational system of selection, collection, arrangement and preservation of objects. In seeking to expand the curatorial practices for fashion I reviewed standard exhibition narratives and questioned how certain meanings and particular experiences are conveyed. I list here customary approaches for the fashion exhibition: the historic survey; single designer/retrospective; design practices; personal collection or wardrobe; cross-disciplinary practices between fashion and art; fashion and decorative art; fashion and architecture; commissioned thematic work; and collection survey. To begin reflection about the display condition and the expression of fashion I will discuss here briefly the single designer show and the collection survey as examples of customary museum practice.

### *Retrospective*

The single designer retrospective has been a popular yet controversial style of exhibition making. The 'grand' style of fashion narrative developed during the 1970s and 1980s. It derived from exhibition practices associated with the Costume Institute at the Metropolitan Museum of Art under the guidance of special consultant Diana Vreeland (1972–1989), former editor of New York *Vogue*. Debra Silverman's major critique of Vreeland's curatorial style noted her opulent exhibition staging represented 'a life of permanent pleasure' (Silverman 1986, p. 91). However, Vreeland's positioning of fashion in a major fine art museum was a contentious one and she put forward narratives that were responsive to articulation of the fashion system.



*The world of Balenciaga* 1973 (Stevenson 2008) and *Twenty-five years of Yves Saint Laurent* 1983, both curated by Vreeland, were precedents for the now familiar ‘blockbuster’ fashion survey show. I understood that the selection of one designer’s work displayed by seasonal collections was a means to convey the fashion design cycle. The dissemination of collections from design house archives to private wardrobes through the museum meant the viewer could experience the fashion system as represented by materials of the design process, circulation and consumption of fashion. The fashion retrospective exemplified the ceaseless activity of fashion design practices in assembling together the seasonal rollout of clothing collections. The *Yves Saint Laurent retrospective* at the Art Gallery of NSW, for instance, displayed 218 garments (Meek 1987).

Vreeland’s model was not based on scholarship or accompanied by groundbreaking text; she sought to evoke the experience of clothes in a bold and memorable statement. The next generation of Costume Institute curators, Richard Martin and Harold Koda, suggested that Vreeland’s exhibitions offered a different kind of fashion narrative, one perhaps more attuned to ‘the nonchalant editorial fluency of the fashion magazine rather than the scholarly discourse of art’; however, it was a narrative that laid the groundwork for future curatorial models (Martin & Koda 1992, p. 19).

Elizabeth Wilson argued that the grand fashion narrative put forward by Vreeland was possibly a strategy designed to garner serious acknowledgement of fashion practices (Wilson 2005). However, criticisms directed towards the genre generally attacked the approach of hagiography (Craik 1994, Steele 2005, Stevenson 2008), conservatism (Beward 2003) and replication of art values, or point to commercial advantages for living designers (Sudjic 2001). In 2000 I curated the Gianni Versace retrospective 1982–1997 at the National Gallery of Victoria. (ill.1.06) This was a travelling exhibition derived from an exhibition originally curated by Richard Martin (1997) from the Costume Institute.

When I curated the exhibition for Melbourne I made connections to the local community, including Australian clothing importers and clients. In response to criticisms against the retrospective exhibition style I had chosen, showing one designer’s particular style, I decided to use the influence of the art museum on Versace’s designs as a way of folding the exhibition back on itself, showing the legacy of museums in creating



### 1.03

Russian dresses 1976–77, published in Saint Laurent (1983), p. 56

### 1.04

Jacket and pants spring–summer collection 1962, published in Saint Laurent (1983), p. 61



**1.05**

African dresses spring–summer collection 1967,  
published in Saint Laurent (1983), p. 50





## 1.06

*Gianni Versace: the retrospective 1982–1997*  
2000–2001, National Gallery of Victoria

new designs. The exhibition garments were also related to the Gallery's permanent collection of visual and decorative arts, to extend the ideas of the exhibition into other domains of the museum. The show was popularly received, breaking existing National Gallery of Victoria attendance records – a testimony to the strong positioning of the genre.<sup>vi</sup>

### *The collection survey exhibition*

The multimedia elements I discussed earlier were activated for an immersive experience in the exhibition I curated for the reopening of the National Gallery of Victoria International in 2003: *House mix: highlights of the international fashion and textiles collection* (Healy 2003). This was a survey exhibition that introduced 'sampling' of the museum holdings. The selection of works in a survey can frame looking into the repository to reveal 'highlights', show a chronological ordering across the collection or introduce the community to new acquisitions. In the first exhibition in the 'new' fashion gallery, I introduced the analogy of the club DJ sampling music on the dance floor as the curation model, to illustrate the arrangement or articulation of works. The result was the presentation of a series of fashion ideas that fused both historical and contemporary works, tracked in distinct mixtures of clothing and accessories that worked in a visually harmonious and thematic dialogue.

In the *House mix* exhibition, the new gallery space was digitally programmed with sound and electronic imagery. Two large multimedia screens projected hundreds of snapshots of the collection in colour-coded sequence. I found the ability to stretch the contents of the exhibition outside the physical nature of the exhibition extended the experience of fashion across the museum holdings and the fashion system. The surround sound program, for instance, played ambient fashion noises from stiletto heels to the camera shutters of the paparazzi to make connections with the sensations of fashion. Slowly revolving plinths reflected the idea of setting garments in motion.



**1.07**

*House mix: highlights of the international fashion  
and textiles collection 2003–2004,  
National Gallery of Victoria, International,.*



## NEW PRACTICES

In recent years, some curators have questioned the traditional form of fashion display and have begun to critique conventional museum practices by proposing new understandings of the customary exhibition. Here, I discuss briefly three approaches to the exhibition, from the Antwerp fashion museum MoMu, the independent London-based curator Judith Clark, and Andrew Bolton of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Each model has enabled experimentation with the nature of the exhibition and the research of fashion. When Antwerp's fashion museum opened in 2002, the inaugural display facilitated an exploratory framework to critique how a fashion museum might operate. *Selection 1: backstage* exhibited the fashion collection in storage vessels. Swapping the exhibition vernacular for storage was a way to embrace fewer controlled conditions – items are discovered without distinction (Loppa et al. 2002). I recognised that the display of storage conditions was a more humble and inclusive reading of fashion than that usually presented in a museum. The exhibition suggested the performance of the museum by engaging across different institutional systems of arrangement.

Judith Clark's *Malign the muses: when fashion turns back* 2004 was an exhibition that generated controversy in the field (McNeil 2008; Taylor 2006; Wilson 2005). Clark's exhibition researched 're-staging' the relationship between contemporary fashion and its history. Clark's idea of 're-staging' was to breakaway from traditional sequences of curatorial activities or fashion precedent and make new relationships between objects. In the exhibition book she reminded us of the possibilities offered by curation, arguing that 'Curating is like creating a new grammar, new patterns of time and reference ... Unlike language, but more like the multiple meanings of a pack of tarot cards, objects can be read back to front and side to side' (Breward 2004, p. 12).

Clark invited viewing fashionable clothing like a game, set within an elaborate fairground, where the community experience the exhibition through large theatrical props, optical devices and varied scales. Clark's grammar and game plan placed less emphasis upon the selection of objects or didactic information<sup>vii</sup> to test various fashion hypotheses or environments (Breward 2004).



An exhibition book documented the ‘ideas or views’ informing the show but did not attempt to compile its contents (Beward 2004). Clark’s curation was a collaborative practice, as she worked with others including academic Caroline Evans and illustrator Ruben Toledo. Elizabeth Wilson argued that Clark’s curatorial model was one that departed from ‘the traditional “garment as object” approach, instead attempting to ‘draw the viewer’s attention to the meanings of clothes’ (Wilson 2005, p. 230).

The final exhibition I review here is *Anglomania: tradition and transgression in British fashion*, curated by Andrew Bolton.<sup>viii</sup> The idea of Englishness was represented by presenting fashion and decorative art in a series of imaginary fictions and characterisations. Bolton curated fashion outside the customary limitations of the historic interior of the period room set with furnishings and costumes in chronological and stylistic matches. Bolton’s exhibition, set in period rooms of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, audaciously mixed historical and contemporary modes, sometimes in the same clothing ensemble. He composed garments or ‘dressings’ like costuming for dramatic characters in theatre or paintings (Bolton 2006, p. 12). The luscious catalogue documented each scenario and the curation of specific relationships in each room. For instance:

Lady Coventry’s ‘death by vanity’ informs the vignette in Croome Court, in which the figure, wearing a headdress by Stephen Jones in the form of a raven (a Romantic symbol of death) reaches to touch her mirrored reflection. Similar to the Meissen birds on the pier table, the headdress is a three-dimensional representation of the birds in the tapestry surrounds.

(Bolton 2006, p. 69)

In this method of selection and research, Bolton arranged clothing relevant to the room interior for symbolic, metaphorical or iconographic associations (Bolton 2006). Translucent mannequins accessorised by extreme wig styles were used to provocatively evoke an avant-garde and adventurous style of dressing that juxtaposed dramatically against the traditional room settings. In the clash between contemporary and historic styling, Bolton used the exhibition to research the idea of ‘Englishness’ and strove to connect a

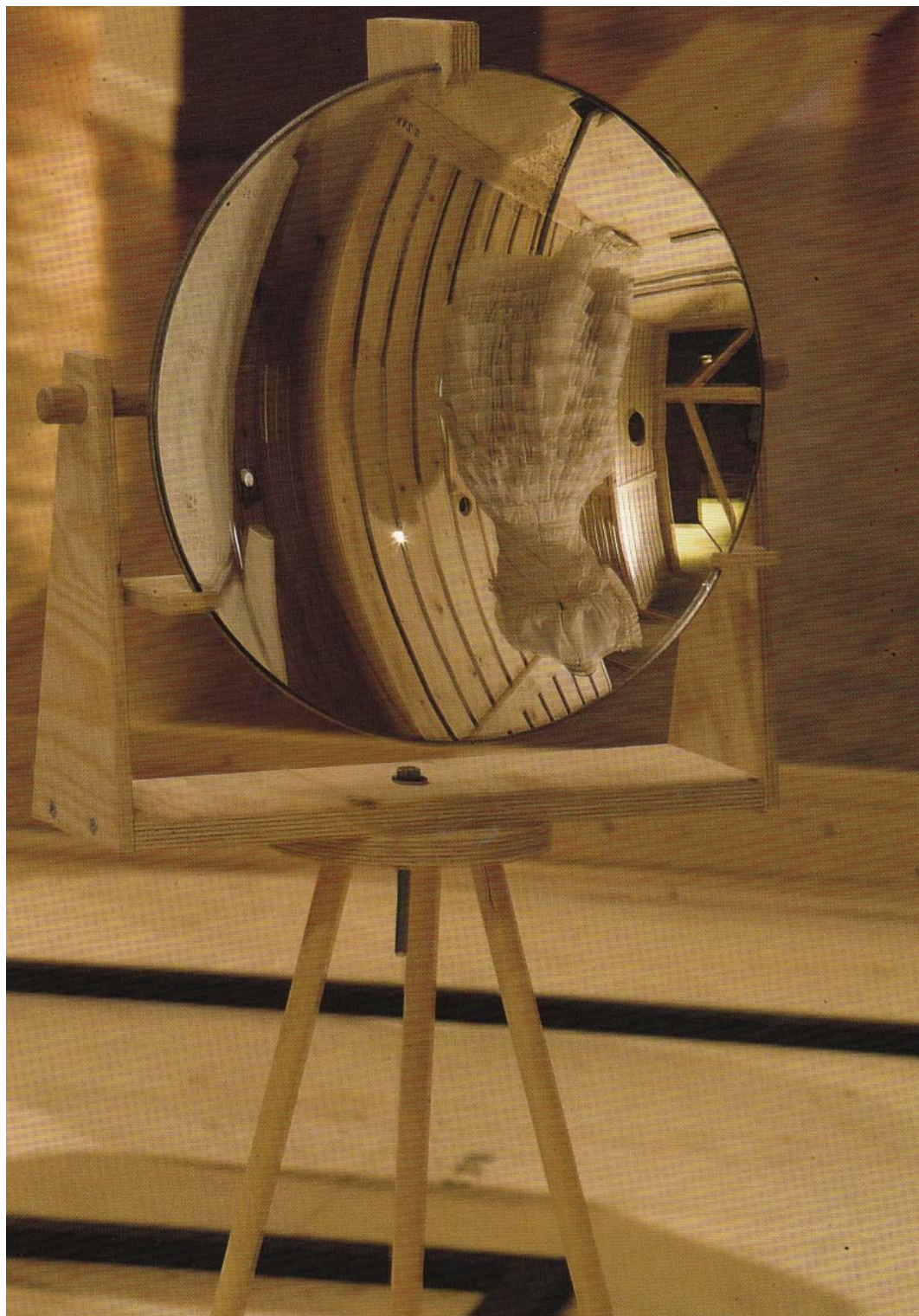


### 1.09

Reappearances: getting things back installation from  
*Malign muses: when fashion looks back*,  
 MoMu Antwerp, published in Clark (2004) p. 153

### 1.10

Phantasmagoria: the amazing lost & found installation from  
*Malign muses: when fashion looks back*,  
 MoMu Antwerp published in Clark (2004) p. 116



**1.08**

Looking in and out,  
installation from *Malign muses:  
when fashion looks back*,  
MoMu Antwerp,  
published in Clark (2004), p. 151



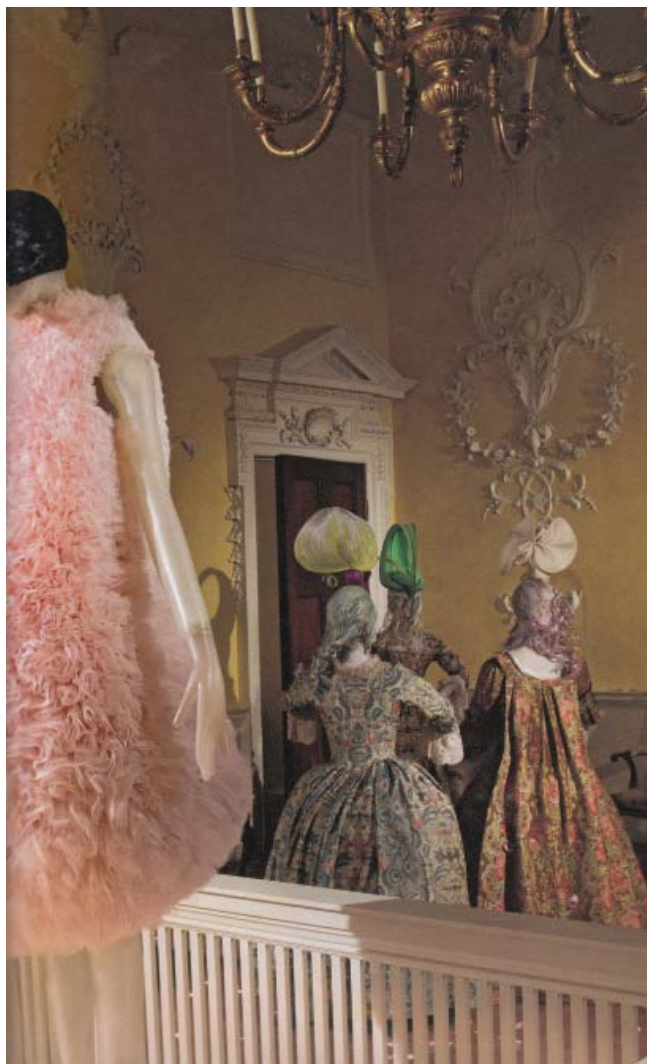
### 1.11

The English Garden installation,  
eighteenth-century *robes* with Philip Treacy *hats*  
spring–summer 2000, Hussein Chalayan *dress*  
autumn–winter 2000–2001 in the Dining room  
from Kirtlington Park, Oxfordshire (c.1748) from  
*AngloMania: tradition and transgression in  
British fashion*, Metropolitan Museum of Art,  
New York published in Bolton (2006) p. 31

### 1.12

Francomania installation,  
John Galliano for Christian Dior Haute couture *Dress*  
1998 with Stephen Jones *headdress* 2006  
in the Tapestry room from Croome Court,  
Worcestershire (c.1771) *AngloMania: tradition and  
transgression in British fashion*,  
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York  
published in Bolton (2006) p. 71





deeper understanding of British style through themes of satire, theatricality and spectacle.

The three exhibition models discussed above suggested using the museum repository, restaging history and creating imaginary fictions, to experience fashion in the museum. These exhibitions disrupted notions about standardised groupings, the individualisation of key works and the research of fashion. In some ways, I saw in these emergent practices alignment to the visual repertoire of the contemporary catwalk show or magazine layout. The performance aspect of fashion was accentuated in the creation of imaginary clothing fictions and artistic or less didactic formats. These exhibitions followed a similar visual path to Vreeland's displays but instead of conveying generalised notions about fashion history or style they were underpinned by scholarship that positioned the exhibition in critical and inventive ways. In devising new models to articulate fashion, these curators constructed experiences and exhibition environments to immerse the community into the ideas of fashion suggested by the arrangement of clothes. However, the exhibitions' treatment of dressed appearances did not necessarily convey a sense of the wearer. In my own research project and the development of two exhibitions, I thought about another set of associations for fashion in the generation of a more mundane expression – or kind of anti-brilliance aesthetic. Unlike the spectacular fashion images astutely put forward by Vreeland, Clark and Bolton, I intended to extend the curatorial rendition of fashion and to study fashion outside the imagined spectacle of dressing up and mass collective showings. I contemplated the potential for a fashion exhibition to elicit more intimate tactics, implied by *undress* and circumstances related to wear.

## TO WEAR FASHION: SOCIAL LIFE AND LANGUAGE

In addressing the research question ‘what is missing in the fashion exhibition of the museum?’ my starting point was to study the state of appearances. In setting up the visual experience of the fashion exhibition, I appropriate here an amusing scene of intense appreciation by the young character, Freddie, viewing a fashion exhibition, from Lee Tulloch’s novel *Fabulous nobodies*:

‘Cristobal Balenciaga!’ Freddie sighs as we’re standing in the exhibition room at the Fashion Institute . . . I read one of the catalogue cards out aloud to Freddie:

‘Evening coat. Tulle covered with bright green ostrich feathers by Judith Barbier. Winter 1964. Worn by the Comtesse de Martini.’

‘Oh God’ moans Freddie, in ecstasy . . .

‘And look at this!’ I say pointing to the display next to it. ‘Evening coat. White organza with applied flowers, made of pink and white parachute silk. Summer 1964. Lent by M.Hubert de Givenchy, Paris.’

‘Oh, God,’ moans Freddie again. ‘It’s beyond!’

‘How do you think I’d look in this?’ I ask, contemplating a mannequin swathed in Bubble dress, violet nylon tulle and organdy appliqué, Winter 1961.’ ‘Do you like the colour?’

(Tulloch 1999, pp. 129–130)



The excerpt above illustrates the visual framework of a clothes exhibition where fashion is depicted through a series of dressed mannequins accompanied by specific identifying information. Having noticed the mannequin was a defining element of the fashion exhibition, I set about questioning this relationship. I sought to provoke the condition of display. This provocation began with disrupting the habitual and custodial practice suggested by clothing when exhibited on a body/mannequin and the museum rendition of dressed states. I noted that criticisms about fashion exhibitions centred on the formulaic appearances produced by the dressed mannequin form included conditions of dislocation, quiescence, aesthetics and disembodiment (Craik 1994; de la Haye 2006; Entwistle & Wilson 1998; Palmer 2008a; Taylor 2002). There was acknowledgement that the museum's controlled arrangement created a disturbing disjunction from the wearer.

These critical observations were key in my exploration of how the wearer can be represented in the fashion exhibition. They fuelled my desire to use an expression of wear, or the wearer, as a platform for critiquing what happens in a fashion exhibition. In response to the dressed condition, I devised an undressing scheme to dismantle fashion's grand narratives and expose missing relationships in the museum. In this proposition I saw activating the state of embodiment as a means to study fashion through spatial and social experiences.

The method of undressing I introduced into the research was a means to remove the controlled arrangement implied by a dressed appearance and to experiment with diverse appearances activated by an undressed state. I proposed to transgress the arrangement of dressing and intended to develop two exhibitions for the research project under this premise. This invited an exhibition model that created community associations between fashion and clothes by the expression of dressing/wear.

## THOMAS CARLYLE: TAILORS AND TAILORED

I positioned the project around using the undressing model for curating two exhibitions. I brought into play the wear/dressing proposition informed by theories of dress found in the writings of Thomas Carlyle and Roland Barthes. Carlyle's nineteenth-century satiric fiction, *Sartor Resartus* – The Tailor Retailored or The Patcher Repatched – (Carlyle 1965; Keenan 2001; Tennyson 1984), was an essential text in developing the curatorial proposition, because Carlyle's writings invite looking at the world through clothes. I describe here briefly the nature of these writings, which work in the project as a facilitator for practice. I generated ideas from this source about transgressing institutional forms and expressing various clothing associations. My reflection about the social space of fashion was also derived from these theories. *Sartor Resartus* was an influential nineteenth-century text recognised both for a complex literary structure and for its social commentary about cultural and economic institutions (Tennyson 1984). The work was first published in serial form in the English periodical *Fraser's magazine for Town and Country* from 1833 to 1834 and circulated as a complete volume in 1838 (Tennyson 1984). Carlyle selected a clothing metaphor to describe institutional networks: he was struck by 'there being Tailors and Tailored' in the world (Carlyle 1965, p. 41). I was interested in Chris Vanden Bossche's suggestion that Carlyle's repatching or refashioning proposition implies the necessity for cultural institutions to change through a continuous cycle of revolutions (Vanden Bossche 1991). A thread running through my project was the idea of refashioning and renewal of existing structures supposed in curatorial practices of fashion.

In the early stages of writing *Sartor Resartus* Carlyle recorded in his journal, 'I am going to write – Nonsense. It is on "Clothes" Heaven be my comforter!' (Tennyson 1984). Mark Engel noted Carlyle's narrative tradition followed the path of 'epics of nonsense' from Jonathon Swift's *Gulliver's travels, a tale of a tub and the battle of the books* 1726 to Laurence Sterne's *The life and opinions of Tristram Sandy, gentleman* 1759–69 and Voltaire's *Candide: or, all for the best (Candide, ou L'Optisme)* 1759 (Carlyle 2000). In the odd fiction, *Sartor Resartus*, Carlyle cast himself in the role of the English editor for a manuscript about 'Clothes,

their origins and influence' by the German academic Herr Diogenes Teufelsdröckh (God-born Devil's dust or dung),<sup>ix</sup> a professor of 'Allerley-Wissenschaft' (Things in General) from the University of Weissnichtwo (Know-not-where). Carlyle as editor worked on preparing the treatise for publishing to make the work accessible to the British community (Carlyle 1965, p. v).

As previously noted, *Sartor Resartus* has been well established in the literary field since the nineteenth century; however, more recently the scholarship of William Keenan (2001) and Michael Carter (2003) has placed Carlyle's fiction within the framework of fashion scholarship. In Keenan's reappraisal he described Carlyle as the 'pioneer philosopher–theoretician of dress' (2001, p. 18). Even though *Sartor Resartus* was a satirical work, known as a curious treatise on the philosophy of clothes and compiled by an imaginary professor, it critiqued multiple meanings created by clothes:

that the grand Tissue of all Tissues, the only real Tissue, should have been quite overlooked by Science — the vestural Tissue, namely, of woolen or other cloth; which Man's Soul wears as its outmost wrappage and overall.

(Carlyle 1965, p. 2)

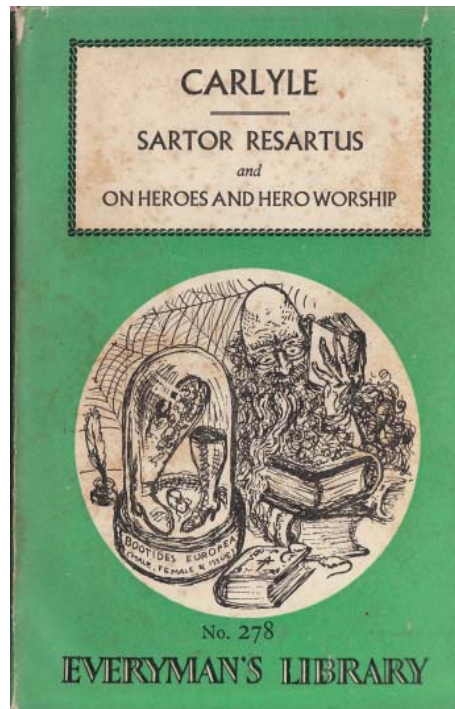
Carlyle's clothing proposition — studying 'the World in clothes' (1965, p. 25) — was astute. The text embraced the lack of serious attention given to clothing and the limited philosophical and theoretical engagement with it. Carlyle's metaphor placed emphasis on the persuasive role clothing played in everyday life (Soper 2001). In his 'RagFair of a world' (1965, p. 170), clothing was distinguished across areas of cultural difference, symbolic and social gesture and consumerism; an essential commodity presented in critique of economic and cultural institutions. Carlyle profiled clothing in multiple situations, drawing relationships to various social and cultural constructs and everyday encounters (Carter 2003; Keenan 2001). I found in this network of relationships the beginnings of my research proposal. It suggested the possibilities of curating fashion in an exhibition that represented the diversity of human experience as revealed by dressing activities or events. Carlyle had also established fashion notions about design and the creation of new clothing styles

through his account of 'an Architectural idea' (Carter 2003).

In all his Modes, and habitory endeavours, an Architectural Idea will be found lurking; his Body and the cloth are the site and materials whereon and whereby his beautiful edifice, of a Person, is to be built. Whether he flow gracefully out in folded mantles, based on light sandals; tower-up in high headgear, from amid peaks, spangles and bell-girdles; swell out in starched ruffs. Buckram stuffings, and monstrous tuberosities; or girth himself into separate sections, and front the world an Agglomeration of four limbs – will depend on the nature of such Architectural idea.

(Carlyle 1965, p. 26)

In his curious mixture of clothing ideas, Carlyle playfully referenced clothing sans wearer. This allusion had a particular resonance in my rethinking and undressing of the representation of clothing in the museum. I noticed that in the state of being unoccupied, clothes continued to maintain connections to individual, community and institutional value systems. Indeed, Carlyle made quite humorous claims about clothing fetishism. The professor declares that the attraction of and complete admiration for clothing is only fully realised in vacated states, without the disturbance caused by human occupation. He jibes: 'That reverence which cannot act without obstruction and perversion when the clothes are full. May have full course when they are empty' (Carlyle 1948, p. 180). Under the premise of empty clothing, Carlyle formulated a spatial understanding of clothing in observing states of inhabitation. I noted the nomenclature he used for clothing in *Sartor Resartus* included phrases like 'an architectural idea', 'rag-screen', 'shells', 'outer husks of bodies', 'cast', 'hollow' and 'empty'. I saw in the site of empty clothing the potential occupation or residency that housed the dynamics of fashion supposed by wear. The space of clothing was a worn construction, a place for both revelation and concealment. Carlyle's 'habitory endeavours' established engagement with clothing through activities related to social life. In the chapter 'Old clothes', for example, abandoned clothing was enlisted as a mnemonic device, a keeper of life's memories, a material form embedded with traces from



1.13

*Sartor Resartus* cover from Everyman's edition  
published in Carlyle (1965)



THE REAL AND ITS IDEAL



'The real and its ideal' illustrated by Edmund J. Sullivan,  
published in Carlyle (1898)



**1.14** (centre)  
'Teufelsdröckh's reverence for empty clothes'  
illustrated by Edmund J. Sullivan in Carlyle (1898)

**1.15** (left)

**1.16** (right)  
'In Monmouth street' illustrated by Edmund J. Sullivan,  
published in Carlyle (1898)

everyday actions and events. In the description of clothing as 'ghosts of life', Carlyle associated dress with domestic situations, clothing haunted by the experiences of both significant and mundane aspects of people's life. Carlyle argued in the setting of the second-hand clothes market that clothing was invested with a lifetime of experience:

Silent are they, but expressive in their silence: the past witnesses and instruments of  
Woe and Joy, of Passions, Virtues, Crimes, and all the fathomless tumult of Good  
and Evil in 'the Prison men call Life'.

( Carlyle 1965, p. 181)

The ideas I developed from Carlyle's fiction were about both museum and collection practices. I sought to study fashion through the social life of clothing. The 'world in clothes' suggested encounters with a diversity of clothing expression. The clothing entity itself was key in describing actions of fashion, by reading individual clothing as a social space. These observations about the commodity of clothing related to similar conditions found in retail, exhibition and wardrobe environments where clothes are continuously scrutinised and fêted in a disembodied state. In exploring the realisation of wear in a fashion exhibition I sought to test diversity of clothing forms found in shifting appearances. Clothing in a vacated state with 'nobody' around was a tactic to further examine the meanings of what was not represented and the conditions of representation. Carlyle discussed how fashion/clothing and the body exist in the world and drew attention to our everyday relationship to clothing itself. Philosophy and theories of representation bring to the fore the inseparable relationship between the body and clothing (Calefato 2004; Cavallaro & Warwick 1998; Entwistle 2001). In suggesting undressing fashion, I sought to uncover the social spaces of clothes by making associations between fashion and the wearer. It was therefore possible to reveal traces of being: clothing's connectedness to everyday life.

While studying *Sartor Resartus* I rummaged around for various editions in secondhand stores and online libraries for use in the research. I noticed the different illustrations used either on the cover or accompanying

the text depicted various clothing narratives. These pictorial references illustrated discarded clothing states in situations showing either veneration or dereliction. The clothing was contained outside the body by devices like a glass dome, a coat hook, a dress stand, second-hand clothing racks and trestle tables. These were devices I could potentially appropriate to locate fashion in domestic spaces of both display and possession. These associations supported individual clothing circumstances and observed clothing appearances sited in familiar narratives of wear. Later in the research I referred to these sites in constructing the two exhibition narratives.

## ROLAND BARTHES: DRESS AND DRESSING

Roland Barthes was the second theorist of fashion who provided a framework for thinking about my work, for he studied fashion through the expression of clothing 'as an object of appearance'. French essayist Michel de Montaigne noted, 'Fashion is the science of appearances, and it inspires one with the desire to seem rather than to be' (Barthes 2006, p. 21). Barthes' exploration of fashion – in particular his investigation of the language of clothes and *The fashion system* (1967) – was also essential in setting up the dressing/wear proposition. In Barthes' early essays, 'History and sociology of clothing' 1957 and 'Language and clothing' 1959 (Barthes 2006), he proposed a possible history and sociology of clothing forms (Barthes 2006). The study of signs identified two groupings, 'dress' and 'dressing', which represented the social institution and the individual act respectively. In adopting the Saussurean model, Barthes extended Trubetsky's structuralist work and applied the linguistic distinctions 'langue' (institutional) and 'parole' (personal) in his comprehensive discussion about characterisation of clothing relationships. In dress (langue), he elucidated formal and fixed clothing arrangements. This classification covered generic dress types and described ritualistic and stereotypical forms like wedding dress or the business suit. Dress also incorporated the ordering of clothing, the dressing sequence for outer and undergarments and reconstructed models designed for theatrical or cinema performance (Barthes 2006). With the classification dressing (parole), Barthes was



concerned with *the experience* of clothing. This distinction described the way a person chooses to dress, 'the wearer's particular way of wearing clothes' (Barthes 2006, p. 27). These were unrestrained activities linking together a vast array of clothing appearances. Dressing integrated notions of wear, idiosyncratic styles from untidiness, clothing mix and personal choice, to practices with no particular system or conventional order (Barthes 2006). In Barthes' analysis, subtle yet obvious distinctions are made between dress and dressing that assisted me in distinguishing complexities of clothing appearances and dressing systems.

In this analysis, the fashion exhibition operates within a regulated system where appearance is maintained by museum protocols of collection, selection and conservation. In this setting, the fashion object or garment is represented by dressed states with clothing sorted into mannered groupings, assembled in matching or compatible clothing ensembles and prepared to appear in the 'best' condition. However, dressing nuances are always present within this arrangement. There are perhaps traces of dressing, where clothing is individualised by previous wear, or customised by curatorial modes of dressing. In his semiotic system Barthes identified social conditions of fashion through the articulation of changing clothing forms. As I reviewed the missing elements suggested by the museum display of fashion, I was aware that these dressing complexities of fashion, which Barthes struggled to express, are not clearly understood. In observing the transformative qualities of dress proposed by acts of dressing, as discussed by Barthes, I anticipated the potential for a curatorial model that researched these idiosyncratic dressing acts to describe the activities of fashion

Carter noted that the *Fashion system* 1967 established Barthes' reputation as a 'fashion thinker' (2003, p. 144). In this work Barthes planned to change the means by which clothing and fashion were studied, identifying a 'system'. He began to unravel the complex relationships operating within fashion. However, Barthes' enquiry was criticised for concentrating on the rhetoric of fashion and lacking of engagement with the 'real garment'. Elizabeth Wilson (1985) argued Barthes' methodology placed 'fashion in a vacuum' and that within it fashion 'has no history or material function' (1985, p. 57). Wilson and Joanne Entwistle (2001) both exposed Barthes' structuralist approach for neglecting social and everyday practices of dress. Unlike Wilson and Entwistle, Michael Sheringham (2006) saw Barthes approach as in no way uninterested in the

social meaning of fashion activities; that is, wear. Sheringham argued that Barthes understood fashion as a system of everyday life. He recognised fashion through differences in clothing signs, powerful forms of signification created by 'fashion' details communicated by choice of materials, construction features or event scenarios (Sheringham 2006).

Barthes' study was clearly prefaced as an analysis of fashion magazines, in particular *Elle* and *Le Jardin des Modes* from 1958 to 1959. Relevant in the positioning of my research are Barthes' discussions about the communication of fashion; his identification of various forms of fashion, which we encounter in everyday life. Three different networks of communication and consumption are operating within the system: 'real clothing', 'image clothing' and 'written clothing'. Barthes conveyed the particular actions that defined each state: 'we must study either acts, images or words' (1985, p. 7). Barthes distinguished the 'real garment' (the manufactured garment), by the acts of circulation and consumption operating through a garment's purchase and use. Barthes suggested in an appendix to the *Fashion system* titled 'History and the diachrony of fashion' that fashion needed to continually change. I applied this section in my proposition to undress the museum conditions of fashion arising from the idea of newness, to reveal meanings proposed by circumstances of wear.

Barthes brought my attention to two rhythms of change for worn clothing. There was one form caused by dilapidation (d) and the other form produced by purchase (p):

(Real) Fashion, we might say, is  $p/d$ . If  $d=p$ , if the garment is replaced as soon as it is worn out, there is no Fashion; if  $d>p$ , if the garment is worn beyond its natural replacement time, there is pauperization; if  $p>d$ , if a person buys more than he wears, there is Fashion, and the more the rhythm of purchase exceeds the rhythm of dilapidation, the stronger the submission to Fashion.

(Barthes 1985, pp. 298–299)

Barthes' interest in fashion minutiae, discussed in *The fashion system* as well as in earlier writings, marks dressing interactions of 'worldliness'. Sheringham (2006) noted Barthes' astute observation of everyday life,

his attraction to studying 'objects of good communication' that included not only fashion but also embraced social activities like conversations and food. Barthes noticed the 'wider social signification of fashion' and in his early writings 'seeing fashion as a major social object of French mass culture' noted Andy Stafford (2006, p.120). Barthes' real garment of fashion represented an everyday occurrence, fashion realised by dressing actions and situations and conveyed by the diversity of changing appearances

for 'seeing' a real garment, even under privileged conditions of presentation, cannot exhaust its reality, still less its structure; we never see more than part of a garment, a personal and circumstantial usage, a particular way of wearing it.

(Barthes 1990, p. 5)

Barthes' writings assisted framing the research intent and I drew on them to curate fashion by capturing shifting qualities of clothing forms and to show the variables implicit both in wear and the idiosyncratic nature of dressing. In suggesting new models for curating fashion and for evoking relationships between fashion, clothing and the wearer, I used texts by Carlyle and Barthes to ground the research. The writings detailed in this section, which I refer to later in relation to the exhibitions, opened up possibilities for creating new fashion environments. Through the language of dressing I sought to elicit associations — either collectively to extensive social networks or individually by distinctiveness.

In this way, I positioned the curation of two fashion exhibitions to address fashion through ideas related to dressing practices rather than to dressed compositions. I began to reflect about how fashion was disseminated through particular exhibition and display appearances and conditions. Throughout the research project I also refer to exhibitions where contemporary fashion designers used the museum to extend their design practices.

A supplementary thread woven into this study embraces responses by prominent fashion design practitioners to the museum system. Of particular relevance are unconventional designs that occur in pursuit of enlivening fashion, or extend rudimentary clothing representations into dressing practices. Since

the 1970s, for instance, the Miyake Design Studio has tested the possibilities of exhibition practices to research design ideas. Designers continually address concern about how responsiveness to their designs is altered once fashionable clothing is relocated to a museum. Tensions between living and inanimate states are consistently experimented with by the Miyake Design Studio, Hussein Chalayan, Maison Martin Margiela, Yohji Yamamoto, Cosmic Wonder and Bless to suggest an expression of wear in the museum. I found the development of clothing surroundings, or fashion-scapes, in contemporary practices sought to contextualise fashion into an everyday construct similar to my research project. This is discussed further in section 2 in relation to the first exhibition.

## STRIPTease EXHIBITIONS

Here I describe briefly the two exhibitions curated for the project, which are discussed in detail in section 2, 'Thriller', and section 3, 'In tatters', of the exegesis. I noticed the absence of the wearer in museum representation of fashion became a missing dialogue. In response to this 'missing' element, I explored two curatorial models for experiencing an exhibition of fashion framed by a dialogue of wear/dressing. In the early stages of the research I negotiated collaborations with two quite diverse Australian public museums through which to research this dialogue. The National Wool Museum, Geelong, and Como House and Garden, South Yarra, supported the proposition of my curatorial experiments. This established the project and my practice in quite unfamiliar environments, which were not planned with specific exhibitions in mind. As the project progressed, I was stimulated by the role the sites played in driving both the content and atmosphere of the exhibitions. I was more familiar with institutional environments proposed by 'white cube' spaces and glass showcases, so these 'new' surroundings challenged my existing practices and allowed some unexpected opportunities in the research.

Each exhibition evolved in response to these distinctive museum communities and collections.

Unintentionally, I facilitated research within public spaces and collections not specifically associated with fashion. Although at times this seemed a dislocated strategy, as the research progressed I found these less obvious situations activated a more informal and experimental dynamic. I introduced the garments of fashion to these environments unfamiliar with fashion, in a responsive association to the specific museum collection and site. I was not necessarily interested in intrusive tactics of grand narratives but sought to inhabit the surroundings subtly. Although living history and heritage environments offered certain constraints, different protocols and 'house' style, the situation also facilitated broader reflection about 'fashion' surroundings. I expand upon these later in the exhibition dissemination. The collaborating museums were generous in supporting the scope of this research through speculative and often quite unpredictable exhibition models. They imposed few restrictions or directions. These 'new' environments, then, made possible the freedom for new practices to occur and suggested quite diverse fashion encounters. The exhibitions in these museums were perceived as critical interventions for both fashion and museum practices. Although at times I experienced uneasiness about the rawness of aspects of the project, this progressively disappeared. The candidness of exhibition appearances illuminated new ideas about fashion previously concealed or neglected. Ironically, the rawness that I was concerned about engaged the community through an open and random spontaneity, which contrasted with the controlled museum environment. In developing the two exhibitions I collaborated with different practices to create a spontaneous and responsive model, which abandoned the routine exhibition states.



**1.17**

*The blue dress: a curatorial thriller* 2005,  
National Wool Museum, Geelong

# EXHIBITION 1

*The blue dress: a curatorial thriller*

collaboration with the National Wool Museum, Geelong

22 April to 2 November 2005

The first exhibition suggested the experience of one dress in multiple ways. I experimented with the notion of dressing expressed by Barthes (2006). Showing one dress – in an undressed state – I tested changing the experience of the dress through a series of material arrangements. Using this method the community encountered different appearances and circumstances surrounding the dress. I located fashion within the museum setting in domestic sites of either veneration or dereliction. I engaged with Carlyle’s (1965) ‘world in clothes’ to extend the range of clothing narratives. To expand community engagement with the dress I formed social networks around it (Carlyle 1965) in participatory practices of curation inspired by the constructs of thriller literature. The exhibition introduced fashion through exploration of wearing the dress and understanding how the dress wears.

Six thriller episodes:	Identity crisis: storage box	3 August - 7 September
	Tension: wardrobe	7 - 21 September
	Unexpected: floor	21 - 28 September
	Improbable: chair	28 September - 5 October
	Deception: coathanger	5 October - 19 October
	Climax: rack	19 October - 2 November

Development of the project included publicity campaign, dating workshop and radio.

Blind dating workshop, 19 October 2005.

Interview about the workshop with Ingrid Just, National Overnights program for ABC radio,  
17 October 2005.

## EXHIBITION 2

*Noble rot: an alternate view of fashion*

collaboration with the National Trust of Australia (Victoria)

18 February to 1 July 2006.

The second exhibition displayed over one hundred and fifty items from the National Trust Australia (Victoria) collection. Here, I explored extending the dressing/wear dialogue through the experience of 'old' and 'used' fashionable dress. The premise of dressing/wear was pushed to the extreme in experimenting with the nature of the worn out. Carlye's 'silent witnesses' and Barthes' dilapidated states were studied. The exhibition experimented with representational forms for conveying the circulation of fashion by documenting its demise and noticing transience and transformational states.

Transdisciplinary readings of the Trust collection and heritage environment created a series of collaborative practices in response to the collections and environments. These mini-interventions within the larger project included participation from the National Trust curatorial team Katie Symons and Elizabeth Anya-Petrivina, poet Carolyn Leach-Paholski, communication designer Keith Deverell, fashion practice SIX and textile scientist Mac Fergusson.

*Noble rot: an alternate view of fashion*, Como Historic House and Garden, exhibition and public programs ran from 16 February to 4 June 2006. It was staged as part of two major festival programs, the L'Oréal Melbourne Fashion Festival cultural program and the Melbourne Writer's Festival. The project produced an exhibition map, a catalogue, a publicity campaign, guided tours and public talks. At the official opening, the exhibition was launched by Australian photographer Bill Henson.





**1.18**

*Noble rot: an alternate view of fashion 2006,*  
Como House and Garden, South Yarra



**1.19**

Madame Gough, London *Scrap album fancy dress*  
c.1893, National Gallery of Victoria





1.20

After Nicholas de Larmessin II  
*Tailor costume* (Habit de tailleur)

1695–1720

etching and engraving,  
The British Museum, London



### 1.21

BLESS performance at the opening of Invitation no.75

Fashion, Art, Design exhibition,  
Stedelijk Museum Bureau, Amsterdam 2003,

invited guests dress as fictional characters,

photography by Christian Badger,

published online

at [www.smba.nl/en/exhibitions/](http://www.smba.nl/en/exhibitions/)

invitation-no.75.-fashion-art-



## 1.22

Unknown, *The fashionable cow* (Boeuf à la mode)  
1790s, New York Public Library picture collection



## FANCY DRESS, PERFORMATIVE AND PARTICIPATORY PRACTICES

Design ideas associated with fancy dress facilitated inclusion of performative and participatory practices in the curation of the two exhibitions for the project. My initial research paradigm studied the wearer's fancy, the whimsical notion of dressing up in costume. I sought to encompass the social environments for certain garments to amuse and entertain. The composition of make-believe characters transformed the wearer into something else. In Barthes' review of costume histories, he cited the fanciful seventeenth-century designs of Nicholas de Larmessin in 'Costumes grotesques', which captured the 'imaginary essence' of dress (Barthes 2006, p. 22). Barthes discussed these inventions, fanciful representations of various trades and professions that 'composed a dress whose elements were borrowed as if from a dream from the tools of the relevant activity ... a creation which is both poetic and intelligible ... in this fantasy, clothing ends up absorbing Man completely' (Barthes 2006, p. 22).

I was concerned in both the atmosphere generated by fanciful design and the integration or absorption of dress into the wearer. Certainly, the state of misrule anticipated by a fancy dress spectacle, which sometimes presents confronting juxtapositions of archetypal characters, had led to an earlier questioning in the project about the sameness of fashion appearances and arrangements found in the museum environment. Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of the carnivalesque (1984) suggested playful disruptions could critique ordered systems and behavioural patterns. I understood this to be a way to instil the project with dressing dynamics by breaking up existing structures in some way.

I therefore often reverted to critical devices of satire and visual puns to position the atmosphere of disarray in many of the exhibition installations. Although I am conscious of a persuasive sense of humour in my work, this element was rarely reflected upon. In this research I resolved to make this practice more apparent and considered how humour, through particular juxtapositions and alignment of objects, informed dissemination of the research in the exhibition practices. Once I embraced the humorous element, I quickly

established the absurdity of taking things apart, taking things off and looking at things falling apart as an essential part of the wear/dressing exploration. In the 'misrule' situation, I noticed stripping or dismantling clothes identified dressing in terms of an organisational system. The term 'dress' itself implied a particular routine for me to follow: 'to putting things in order', 'to place', 'to arrange', in addition to decoration and adornment (Oxford 2005). Likewise, a state of 'undress' logically aligned the situation to disorder and disarray. In the curious etymology of dress there was a collection of both derogatory and attractive descriptors dependent on the dressed appearance. An insidious connection to not wearing enough clothes for example was found in the idiom 'to dress someone down', ludicrously applied to reprimanding someone sternly (Collins 2000). If an undressed condition challenged organisational systems, therefore, the proposition was one crossing customary boundaries between public and personal environments, and between proper and improper actions. In this manner, unlike dressed states, 'discarded' or 'shed' clothes are uncontrolled and mischievous encounters.

A sweet disorder in the dress  
Kindles in clothes a kind of wantonness;  
A lawn about the shoulders thrown  
Into a fine distraction;  
An erring lace, which here and there  
Enthralls the crimson stomacher;  
A cuff neglectful, and thereby  
Ribbands to flow confusedly;  
A winning wave, deserving note,  
In the tempestuous petticoat;  
A careless shoestring, in whose tie  
I see a wild civility  
Do more bewitch me, than when art  
Is too precise in every part<sup>x</sup>

(Fowler 1991, p.257).





1.23

Michael Baumgarten Twenties recollections,  
photograph published in Theyskens (2003), p. 94





**1.24**

Michael Baumgarten, *Twenties recollections*,  
photograph, published in Theyskens (2003), p. 92



**1.25**

Corriette Schoenaerts, *Map of Europe* 2004,  
photograph for RAILS magazine  
published on [www.corrietteschoenaerts.com/](http://www.corrietteschoenaerts.com/)

The affective and alluring quality produced through material gestures referred to in Robert Herrick's seventeenth-century verse suggests an evocative and sensual portrayal of abandoned clothes.

I looked at the possibilities presented by juxtapositions of undressed or empty clothes strewn across various surfaces. Contemporary photographers Michael Baumgarten and Corriette Schoenarts, for instance, appropriated discarded clothing as the subject of their work. In his photography Baumgarten touches upon the material sensuousness of undressing. His striptease of sorts exhibits abandoned silky and beaded 1920s and 1930s dresses and stockings strewn across the floor. Schoenaerts' photography assembles geographical landscapes through unruly clothing items scattered about a domestic setting. In these compositions I found an experience of wear was conveyed by the gestural qualities in representations of transformational states. Clothing in a disembodied state communicated shifting and animated appearances.

The agency of shed or abandoned clothing elicited possibilities for random and gestural dressing situations. I wondered if observing abandoned clothing in a museum context could produce a carnivalesque moment, where ordinary things are sited in an unexpected or surprising visual manifestation (Bakhtin 1984). There were parallels to the burlesque tradition of striptease — 'the act of becoming bare' (Barthes 2000, p. 86) — in speculation about the undressed fashion exhibition, where intimate clothing experiences are liberated in the provocative art of undressing. In this scenario, fancy accoutrements are scattered about in the aftermath of a voyeuristic dress dismantling. Thinking about everyday situations associated with fashion and the stripping back of the dressed museum exhibition began a liberated course to explore further the spaces of fashion.

I studied a diverse array of contemporary and historic material in developing the project. In the beginning, I sought ways to consider how things come together or fall apart. I referred to accumulative, gathering and refashioning systems, discovered in popular miscellanea including fancy dress manuals, jokes, household advice books, forensic science, thriller fiction, waste recycling, historic re-enactment societies, fashion magazines and ebay. These sundries were used within the project to construct a mixture of factual, fictional

and humorous elements to create a dressing/wear narrative. This included the title of Carlyle's clothing text *Sartor Resartus*, which referred to change: the idea of transformation from making new appearances, by putting things together in another way, through refashioning processes, acts described as either 'retailored' or 'repatched'.

The project established an experience of fashion by curating the circulation and consumption of clothes captured in the states of dilapidation and obsolescence. The understanding of wear rarely entertained in museums involved noticing the ephemeral quality of fashion. I suggested a dialogue of wear in the museum by revealing gestural qualities of clothing, the poetics of decay and memories of occupation and use as representations of everyday experiences of fashion. Using this method I exposed or stripped back the nature of appearances in the museum encounter of fashion. I have contributed to the field by rethinking the experience of the fashion 'object' in relation to exhibition practices and by bringing the object into participatory networks of wear.

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- 1.12 Francomania installation, John Galiano for Christian Dior Haute couture Dress 1998 with Stephen Jones *headdress* 2006 in the Tapestry room from Croome Court, Worcestershire (c.1771) *AngloMania: tradition and transgression in British fashion*, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York published in Bolton (2006) p. 71
- 1.13 *Sartor Resartus* cover from Everyman's edition published in Carlyle (1965)
- 1.14 'Teufelsdröckh's reverence for empty clothes' illustrated by Edmund J. Sullivan in Carlyle (1898) at [www.victorianweb.org/art/illustration/sullivan/1.html](http://www.victorianweb.org/art/illustration/sullivan/1.html)
- 1.15 'The real and its ideal' illustrated by Edmund J. Sullivan, published in Carlyle (1898) at [www.victorianweb.org/art/illustration/sullivan/1.html](http://www.victorianweb.org/art/illustration/sullivan/1.html).
- 1.16 'In Monmouth street' illustrated by Edmund J. Sullivan, published in Carlyle (1898) at [www.victorianweb.org/art/illustration/sullivan/1.html](http://www.victorianweb.org/art/illustration/sullivan/1.html).
- 1.17 The blue dress: a curatorial thriller 2005, National Wool Museum, Geelong
- 1.18 *Noble rot: an alternate view of fashion* 2006, Como House and Garden, South Yarra
- 1.19 Madame Gough, London *Scrap album fancy dress* c.1893, National Gallery of Victoria
- 1.20 After Nicholas de Larmessin II *Tailor costume* (Habit de tailleur) 1695–1720 etching and engraving, The British Museum, London
- 1.21 BLESS performance at the opening of Invitation no.75 Fashion, Art, Design exhibition, Stedelijk Museum Bureau, Amsterdam 2003, invited guests dress as fictional characters, photography by Christian Badger, published online at [www.smba.nl/en/exhibitions/invitation-no.75.-fashion-art-](http://www.smba.nl/en/exhibitions/invitation-no.75.-fashion-art-)
- 1.22 Unknown, *The fashionable cow* (Boeuf à la mode) 1790s, New York Public Library picture collection
- 1.23 Michael Baumgarten *Twenties recollections*, photograph published in Theyskens (2003), p. 94

- 1.24 Michael Baumgarten, *Twenties recollections*, photograph, published in Theyskens (2003), p. 92
- 1.25 Corriette Schoenaerts, *Map of Europe* 2004, photograph for Rails magazine published on [www.corrietteschoenaerts.com/](http://www.corrietteschoenaerts.com/)

## ENDNOTES

- <sup>i</sup> National Gallery of Australia (1981-1990) and the National Gallery of Victoria (1991-2005), independent practice from 2006
- <sup>ii</sup> Specialised collections of fashionable dress or public wardrobes grew much later in the development of the museum. A period of intense activity occurred in the early to mid twentieth century. For instance, the Costume Institute at the Metropolitan Museum of Art was founded in 1944 (Druesdow 1983) and the Cecil Beaton collection of fashion, the basis for the V&A museum's collection, was donated in 1971. Remarkably, the Musée Galliera, the city of Paris Museum of fashion, opened later in 1977. For the institutions where I practiced, the major impetus for fashion collecting at the National Gallery of Victoria was the purchase of the Schofield collection in 1974 and the National Gallery of Australia established their fashion collections with the purchase of the Julian Robinson collection in 1976.
- <sup>iii</sup> The National Gallery of Victoria was founded in 1861. It is the oldest and largest public art gallery in Australia.
- <sup>iv</sup> Lab architectural studio in association with Bates Smart, Melbourne, principal architects Peter Davidson and Donald Bates.
- <sup>v</sup> Mario Bellini Associates architectural firm, Milan, principal architect Mario Bellini with Metier 3, Melbourne.

- <sup>vi</sup> 49,000 people visited the exhibition between 16 November 2000 and 4 February 2001.
- <sup>vii</sup> However Taylor's review is critical of the absence of information about each object: 'This show failed to convince me that "mind over matter" is a valid approach to the display of fashion/dress. There are minimal textual explanations - as if text panels were the devil' (2006, p. 17).
- <sup>viii</sup> The Art Newspaper 2006 annual listing for the world's top exhibition attendance figures ranked at number 30 *Anglomania: tradition and transgression in British fashion* Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 2 May - 4 September 2006. It drew crowds of 3488 per day, and total attendance 377,201.
- <sup>ix</sup> Devil's dust is produced by woollen manufacturers when they convert old clothing rags into cloth called shoddy. The process creates clouds of dust, which consequently cause major health problems, a by-product of the industrial revolution. Carter suggests a possible origin of the name can be found in Friedreich Engels, *The condition of the working class in England 1844* (London, 1892)
- <sup>ix</sup> Robert Herrick (1591-1674) 'Delight in disorder' 1648, poem.







# THRILLER

26 blue dresses

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*For no mere mortal can resist  
The evil of the thriller*

Michael Jackson



## 2.1

Albert Cooke, *C.J. Denny and Co's new wool store*  
*Geelong 1872*, wood engraving,  
 State Library of Victoria

## 2.2

National Wool Museum, cnr Moorabool Street  
 and Brougham Street, Geelong c.1996  
 gelatin silver photographed by Joyce  
 Evans, National Library of Australia

## ONE DRESS

The surrounds of a wool museum formed the unusual setting for this first exhibition of the research project. My curatorial experiments start with a series of chance occurrences, the first being an invitation from Geelong's National Wool Museum (NWM) to curate an exhibition.<sup>i</sup> The NWM is housed in a National Trust-listed building, originally known as the Dennys Lascelles wool store,<sup>ii</sup> that was transformed into a museum in 1988.<sup>iii</sup> Exposed stone masonry, wooden floorboards and skylight windows retain connections to the nineteenth-century building's original functions of wool storage and trade. These 'historical' surfaces interact with the more recent museum infrastructure and displays of wool-related objects. States of liveliness are conveyed through simulation, immersion and re-enactment devices, from shearing soundscapes and hands-on knitting machines to the aroma of greasy wool. This wool setting traverses representations of living and non-living conditions. Within it, I speculated about possible curatorial models for producing a fashion encounter to study the dichotomy between material objects/clothing and events.

In storage I noticed quite an eclectic assortment of wool-related items, from quilts through prize-winning knitting to Olympic uniforms. I was surprised, however, to find only one fashionable garment: a stylish and 'worn' blue dress, stored dressed on a custom-made mannequin. Apparently it was an unsolicited gift, deposited anonymously at the museum's front desk. The dress bears the label of the design house, Halleudeu, London. Made from a fine wool Chantilly lace coloured peacock blue, the garment has some odd stains which erratically mar its appearance. Sparse museum documentation alludes to the impression of an unknown wearer. The catalogue worksheet records: 'Little is known about the origins of this dress. It has been made for an elfin-slim figure or one chastened by corsetry'. The museum acquired the dress for its relevance to textile technology, as it represented the fashion industry's consumption of the finest quality wool. In 2002, funded by a Victorian State Government grant, the dress underwent extensive conservation treatment, storage and display preparation.



## 2.3

Gallery spaces  
c. 2003





## 2.4-2.5

knitted food exhibit,  
National Wool Museum 2005



## 2.6-2.9

Halleudeu, London,  
Dress c.1930-1960  
in storage 2005

This dress suggested the focus for the first exhibition. I found the circumstances surrounding this relatively unknown and obscure clothing item presented a compelling scenario through which to curate the actions of fashion under the premise of wear. Initially, I looked at the dress through the qualities of physical appearances; later the research extended into more abstract and imagined states. In conceiving a sense of the wearer in the blue dress exhibition, I noted Joanne Entwistle's comments about 'dress as an embodied activity and one that is embedded within social relations' (2007, p. 276). Like the social networks of clothing described by Carlyle (1965), I sought to express these relations in the museum representation of fashion. In this first exhibition I studied the embodiment of fashion in the museum. My intention here was to highlight the circumstances of the missing wearer as a way to reflect about the embodied state and activities of fashion. In constructing a clothing narrative about the missing wearer I tested a curatorial model to articulate consumption and circulation of fashion supposed by dressing/wear actions. To initiate this enquiry, I simply began stripping the blue dress from its effigy form.<sup>iv</sup> The undressing performance and the gradual removal of the blue dress from customary display aesthetics were acts that enabled the starting point for this study: to question the representational form supposed by the dressed arrangement. Here, I referred to Barthes' distinctions between dress and dressing, the institutional and individual acts (Barthes 2006). The dress, liberated from the mannequin form, changed appearance and created quite different associations to wear through the agency of transformation. Without the support of a mannequin the dress was an unruly composition.

The close scrutiny of the dress began with the routine museum process of cataloguing. During these activities the curator will notice the particular characteristics that define the dress. These communicate stylistic, aesthetic, technical, social and individual details. There is known material – gathered from observation of the dress – and supposed phenomena. Here, I evoke some of the curatorial experiences as I moved between public and intimate surfaces of the dress.

Dated by the museum c.1930s to 1960s, the dress is one that possibly passed through the wardrobes of several wearers. Although refashioned several times, the dress is well-made; crafted with delicate detailing and lace-on-lace hand appliqué seaming. The Chantilly lace itself is made from a silk ground with woollen





2.10

Designer label



**2.11-2.13**

Undressing of mannequin,  
in storage 2005

infill patterned with a pretty design of full-blown roses, buds and foliage. Once somebody's or somebodies' special occasion outfit, the dress is a complicated design with fitted sleeveless bodice and draped waistline, its full-length skirt extending into a slight fishtail back. Underneath, the skirt is a profusion of blue tulle formed from five attached petticoats. Inside, the wear of the dress and changes to its fabrication can be discerned. Various alterations to the size are indicators of a different wearers and associations. On the surface of the dress are signs of chemical transformation: the silk and wool threads are oddly coloured in dissimilar shades of blue. Cigarette burns and pulls in the lace are mementos of prior events. I noticed left behind on the dress was a pattern of wear, from acts of motion, participation in events and refashioning processes which suggested clothing as a social space.

In seeing the 'social residue' in the blue dress I noted the curator Amy de la Haye's observations about the lack of attention to the 'cultural imprints' found in clothing and the articulation of these states in exhibition practices (2006 p. 136). Unlike 'new' clothing, used clothing represents the experience of fashion; the actions of wear give coherence to clothing as a social space. The motions of the wearer act to continually change the impression, sensation and appearance of the dress. In this respect, Elizabeth Wilson noted the transformational quality of clothing, which unlike a cup or plate collected in the museum, for instance, has the ability to change strikingly in appearance (2005). In responding to the appearances perceived in the static state of the museum display, I speculated about the possibility for the wearing of fashion to be captured not in motion but in revelation of particular 'dressing' characteristics. In the curatorial process the gathering of clothing details, the intricacies that can be found about dressing or wear, are usually intimate encounters. States of appearance studied and known by the curator and recorded in the museum system are rarely conveyed in the display appearance of the dress. This inspired my exploration of an exhibition model for 'wear', encountering fashion through the conditions of dressing. I intended to test the experience of the clothing form and sensation of 'closely looking' through the display of fashion actions suggested by different arrangements of the dress.

By participating in the act of 'dressing' in this enquiry, I perceived fashion in an idiosyncratic composition rather than a more generalised one. Through focusing upon the curation of the *dressing object* I directed





**2.14**

Detail of Halleudeu,  
London, *Dress* c.1930-1960



**2.15**

Detail of Halleudeu,  
London, *Dress* c.1930-1960





**2.16**

Detail of Halleudeu,  
London, *Dress* c.1930-1960

attention towards the activities of the 'unknown' wearer embodied by the dress. This curatorial tactic studied the nuances implicit in the dress form; it looked for traces of wear, transformable states, individualistic references or garment peculiarities, to put forward a sense of the 'dimensions of the wearer' proposed in Barthes' dressing theory (Barthes 2005, p. 19).

The display of a single object is a museum narrative associated with authentication of the exemplary, an exhibition set-up implying notoriety of some kind. With the Halleudeu dress selection, however, I shifted this hierarchical position by assigning prominence to an unknown, rather than well-known or significant, state. As a result, in *The blue dress* I place emphasis on the object's connection to other things. Making familiar associations to dressing gave primacy to the idea of fashion uses or activities. By studying function/acts I participated in the changing form of the dress through the wearer's experience. The activities and relationships surrounding the blue dress were central to this encounter. The dress has no specific information or renown associated with either the wearer's identity or the design house. In this obscurity I procured the blue dress to suggest the collective experience of dressing. Proposing the curatorial 'search' for a wearer enticed communal participation to know more about the dress. Challenging the customary experience of the dressed form, I tested undressing as a way to potentially experience and document the routine of dressing without wearing clothes. The abstraction of the dress in the absence of the museum body/effigy support promoted thinking about intimate readings of the 'used' garment. Possibly, actions of fashion could be suggested by exhibiting clothing in an undressed state.

Here, I began to consider diversity of appearances and the way fashion is dressed in the museum. The exhibition was not simply about experiencing the semblance of the dress but potentially invited revealing and getting to know the dress. In this research, I looked at how fashion could be experienced through a wear/dressing dialogue that introduced clothing as a *dynamic object*. This description references the signification suggested by an object's arrangement and successive experience. Because of this, clothing could be understood as a dynamic object, where there is a flexible condition of continual transformation. Through this wear narrative I experimented with these transformative qualities and convergences to test multiple ways the blue dress is encountered in the museum.

## THE WORLD OF THE THRILLER

In the early stages of the project I planned to simply position the blue dress in an undressed state in one installation, as a singular event. To communicate a dynamic/dressing object, however, it was necessary to consider a more informal or even audacious approach, so I sought another form of exhibition narrative — one facilitated by chance and participatory practices.

I came across Ralph Harper's *The world of the thriller* (a how-to-write-a-thriller guide). Finding and reading Harper's book inspired a disclosure tactic for the blue dress exhibition. The writing guide proposed a potential curatorial model for exploring dressing/wear research. Thriller fiction is a compelling genre: it establishes a foundation of heightened atmosphere, excitement and suspense and suggests discovery about something unknown or perhaps misunderstood. It provides a creative scheme devised to anticipate the witnessing of gripping adventures or compelling situations. Michael Jackson vividly captured the obvious appeal of the category when he sang: 'For no mere mortal can resist/The evil of the thriller'.<sup>9</sup> The thriller structure sets up complex events, where participants are encouraged to grasp unknown elements, seize the premise of not knowing and be captivated. Harper's handbook (1969, p. xi) is useful in this research in pointing to how a potentially intriguing fashion narrative could be built up. The key thriller features acknowledged by Harper include conditions of banality, the vicarious, tension, chaos, unexpectedness, identity crisis and danger. Plot progression is created through an imagined sequence of missing pieces, deduction, a surprise ending or a potentially fatal outcome. In this unfolding construct, uncertain circumstances increase the participants' anticipation as the situation progressively reveals itself. Applying a thriller scenario to an exhibition narrative created opportunities for gradual disclosure, the ability to show one object through a sequence of acts and to highlight shifting conditions supposed by temporal and spatial change. The thriller premise invited the community to experience the dress through a mysterious situation, in order to pursue and perhaps discover a sense of the wearer. Presenting the dress in these varied circumstances proposed an accumulative experience reading fashion through evolving 'dressing' actions.

The improbable 'plot' was pitched to the director of the NWM, Brian Hubbard, for approval. Basically, I suggested an exhibition of the Halleudeu dress through the genre of a curatorial thriller, to study the relationship between the garment and the wearer suggested by dressing practices. I anticipated producing multiple installations over a four-month period. The project was accepted. Having adopted a thriller to lead the Halleudeu dress research, I sought to entertain the unexpected in my curatorial role or character. I could not assume too much control over the thriller's action, so I studied how the course of action might evolve in other ways. I intended not to resolve the action but to follow the thriller's path. In choosing an unresolved action, I was persistent in supporting uncertain elements in the project. Perhaps collective plotting of the thriller might facilitate a more spontaneous and unpredictable character to the exhibition? I decided to direct the thriller not as an individual task but as a collective adventure. A participatory process would involve the community in the thriller's development and produce new relationships with the museum.

The first instance of community interface with the blue dress was a promotional flyer. I realised that an essential element of a thriller is an intriguing beginning so I introduced the notion of an unknown wearer using the widespread networking medium for friendship services – the personal ad. This familiar communication device is directed towards social relationships – whether meeting new people, reconnecting with previous relationships or searching for a missing person – in 'where are you?' style messages. So the flyer sought out the community with the following message:

LOOKING FOR FUN TIMES

LONELY DRESS SEEKS MEMORIES ABOUT THE PAST

IDENTITY IS UNKNOWN

STILL IN GOOD CONDITION, FASHIONABLE AND AN EXHIBITIONIST

WORN LOCALLY

PERMANENT ADDRESS NATIONAL WOOL MUSEUM

VISIT AND HELP WRITE MY STORY



The profile of the dress was aligned to similar circumstances cast by lonely or lost individuals. This more personal connection was created to enlist community collaborators to steer the thriller plot. However, in this conceit the advertisement was drafted many times before the final blue dress personal message was composed. There was slight tension around this communication strategy because of its direct anthropomorphic intention. The first in-house draft simply read: 'Do you know this dress? Have you seen this dress in your local area?' This initial dialogue assisted in clarifying the thriller position. I desired to delve deeper into the enigmatic nature of the project suggested by the thriller, and the embodiment of fashion. In this form of personal engagement I invited the community into the museum to know more about the dress. Describing the dress in a slightly provocative way enlivened the museum object. The premise of the lonely dress individualised the experience of dressing. This social networking strategy signalled the relationships between the dress and previous occupants; it also offered potential rendezvous with new acquaintances — the community — through mediation by personal advertisements.

national wool museum



Looking For Fun Times

LONELY BLUE DRESS SEEKS MEMORIES ABOUT THE PAST.

IDENTITY IS UNKNOWN.

STILL IN GOOD CONDITION, FASHIONABLE AND AN EXHIBITIONIST.

WORN LOCALLY.

PERMANENT ADDRESS NATIONAL WOOL MUSEUM.

VISIT ME AND HELP WRITE MY STORY.



NATIONAL WOOL MUSEUM

Exhibition on show at the National Wool Museum until 31 October 05

Open 9.30am to 5.30pm daily except Christmas day and Good Friday  
26 Moorabool Street Geelong  
Ph (03) 5227 0701  
[www.nwm.vic.gov.au](http://www.nwm.vic.gov.au)



CITY OF GREATER GEELONG

## 2.18

Blue dress promotional flyer,  
National Wool Museum 2005

## THRILLER SURROUNDINGS

For the thriller exhibition, blue dress appearances were proposed as ‘interventions’ or ‘improvisations’ dispersed across the museum. The thriller ‘episodes’ contrasted with the permanent display galleries of fixed arrangements. Blue dress appearances sporadically infiltrated these displays, over several museum levels. They were installed for only a brief period, momentarily disrupting standard configurations of the museum before moving on to another location. The installation made use of few props to support the dress, and minimal interference was enacted upon the current display arrangements. In this way I experimented with an anti-brilliance aesthetic. The thriller envisaged a disparate reading from the archetypal grand fashion narratives projected by catwalk, shop window, fashion TV, blockbuster exhibition or glossy magazine. In developing the blue dress thriller I followed Harper’s guide and his suggestion that an essential thriller plot is ultimately premised around the absurdity of life. I therefore introduced our main character – the blue dress – in familiar circumstances before something quite unexpected happened. For the first episode I sought to access mysterious elements implicit in the museum domain: the concealed areas, where objects are collected, stored and covered from view. For the opening thriller segment, then, the blue dress appeared in the conventional museum site of storage. Community interaction with the blue dress began in this typical, yet exclusive, museum setting, through the simulated environs of a collection repository. This encounter presented the blue dress lying face up, padded and packed, positioned in a large red storage box. A pair of white gloves, a tape measure and a ream of archival tissue paper included in the arrangement represent associated curatorial practices of research, documentation and preservation. In this display setting I invited the community into the curatorial surroundings of the blue dress.

Through this participatory curatorial style, I was able to critique my practice and review traditional forms of curation and exhibition making. The customary didactic expository model described by Andrea Witcomb, where ‘the museum continues to maintain a role for itself as an authoritative source of knowledge’ (2006, p. 356), is one I am familiar with. Instead of following this course I explored another pedagogical style of



exhibition experience. I looked at ways to open up the museum narrative to varied dialogues. In setting up a participatory model, multiple readings of the blue dress were triggered with the assistance of the community. The community engagement with the blue dress exhibition was activated to aid the construction of the museum narrative and experience in selection and arrangement of both display and interpretative elements. I adopted the idea of the search for the unknown wearer as the driver for the community interface. It was a generic device to access a sense of familiarity to everyday actions and engender an opportunity for the community to hypothesise about real or imagined events. The participatory construction of the exhibition generated 'differences of experiences' which assisted crossovers of influence between the community and the museum, a relationship Witcomb describes as interactivity (2006, p. 353). This unpredictable course was a very different context for my practice. I found it challenging and sometimes disturbing to let the exhibition evolve in this progressive way. Suspension of my authority of 'knowing' fashion in a particular framework was difficult. In this situation I rethought the routine of my practice in tandem with reviewing the routine of the dressed fashion exhibition. Stripping back these practices allowed for a gradual evolutionary process without establishing the final resolution of the exhibition form. Although at times I was concerned the exhibition would be critically reviled, I was inspired to continue this line of exploration by the community responses in formulating diverse dressing narratives.

Through the thriller narrative the exhibition reflected upon the question: 'How do we know the dress?' Although the thriller started in a designated place, subsequent installations followed in arbitrary succession; plot progression occurred in quite dissimilar and sometimes surprising ways. To facilitate the action, a community script sheet was placed beside each installation, a scenario-gathering device for people to fill out and help guide each thriller episode. Suggestions for future scenarios, compilations of previous episodes and curatorial discoveries were accumulatively captured in the exhibition script. In the first instance, the community was simply invited to 'Write the label, set the scene, and place the object'. Basic information was collected to consider the formulation of the title, date and conjectural circumstance for each blue dress episode. The sheet concurrently gathered both factual and fictitious information. Suggestions about the dress's physical



**2.19-2.22**

Blue dress episode 1  
*Identity crisis* 2005



## 2.23

Abandoned episode 1

*Identity crisis* 2005

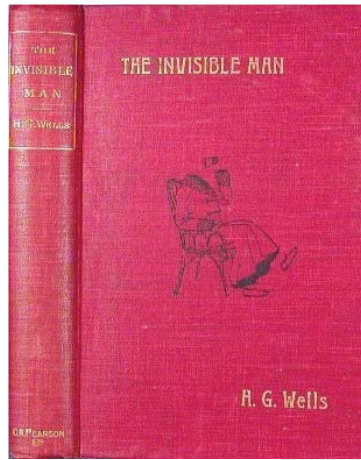
construction, provenance and histories were put forward. The most prevalent direction ascertained from each episode was used to conceive the next one. In this way the thriller eventually evolved to produce six occupied and six abandoned installations. Community responses to the first episode, for example, presented information and guidance about the wearer, the age of the dress and previous encounters with it.<sup>vi</sup> Most respondents profiled the blue dress at 84 years old and many believed it belonged to a murderess, a revelation potentially construed from the observation of several splatter-style stains. For the second episode, respondents overwhelmingly requested an interior sighting of the dress, and that the garment be hung in a wardrobe. The dress progressed from being situated in the realm of the institution to that of domestic surrounds. The community was given no prior notice of the transition from one installation to the next. This scheme intended to build up tension and anticipation about the thriller's path, for either noticing the disappearance or reappearance of the dress. So just one month after the first blue dress outing, an unsettling scene was witnessed at NWM. The storage box was discovered empty, with only a hollow depression in the tissue paper to show where the blue dress had previously been displayed.

The negative space of the blue dress was a constant device used throughout the exhibition to reference the wearer and stimulate the museological imagination. The haunting 'scene was maintained throughout the entire thriller. It signified the presence of the dress yet simultaneously served to establish intrigue about its absence. In leaving the abandoned blue dress sites, I begin to question the various display genres for emulating a sense of embodiment or wear. The museum technique known as the missing person display, 'where the body appears as space, not substance or image' (Sandberg 2003, p. 4.), was referenced. Here, the mannequin form is reduced so only the garment can be viewed, cutting away any visible human form. With this technique, the garment takes on a spectral quality. In the case of *The blue dress*, I created the missing person display by the disembodied impression and/or arrangement of objects, which identified the boundaries where the body/wearer should be but is not. The style mimics the fanciful disembodiment conceit produced in HG Wells' 1897 novel *The invisible man* (Sandberg 2003).

From the first episode of the thriller the community orchestrated potential misadventure theories and invented scenarios to describe the wearer's actions. The community looked beyond standard representational forms, and sought to know more about the circumstances surrounding the dress. In reflection, I noticed that promoting a state of obscurity fired these early responses. The apparent lack of authority assigned to the blue dress made it an open situation, eliciting from the community spontaneous responses of make-believe and the production of potent fictions. The thriller genre encouraged community narrative to participate in the curatorial activities of object analysis: observation and deduction gleaned from encountering particular details of the dress. In order to create new readings about the dress, the installation entertained the premise of unknown circumstances. I intended the blue dress scene to be puzzling.

The unresolved situation invited by *The blue dress* followed a similar community interaction proposed by the aesthetics of the *non finito* (Leader 2002), a creative practice where certain art forms break with conventional modes of representation by being deliberately left unfinished. Darian Leader noted in this state 'it was the viewer's job to complete the picture with their own act of the creative imagination' (2002, p. 121). In such interactions the viewer's role changes from one of a consumer to that of a producer (Leader 2002). In *The blue dress* there was an appealing proposition or composition for the community to complete. It exposed variable readings about the installation. The lines of authority represented by the unique role of the curator in directing or arranging the object's reading were dispersed, allowing the installation to become a participatory experience for the viewer.

I found *The blue dress* creatively compelled the community to conjecture about missing elements, to fill in gaps and propose resolutions. As the dress was reconfigured from box to wardrobe, and respondents observed the dress placed outside standard museum scenarios, the impression of the wearer became more dominant. By the end of the thriller, 87 respondents had contributed to the exhibition script, entering over six hundred suggestions for profiling the blue dress. Thriller fiction provided a framework for the blue dress exhibition to involve diverse interactions and form social connections.



## 2.24

Givenchy,  
Paris *Evening dress* 1960, silk,  
John F. Kennedy Library and Museum  
Published in Bowles, 2001

## 2.25

Cover of H.G Wells  
*The invisible man*  
1897 first edition



The participatory process embraced the community in crafting and researching the museum label to identify the work. Here, I experimented with the role of the museum label in elucidating the wear encounter. I employed the label as an interactive device, to expand the community experience beyond the generic reading.

In engaging with the museum process of identification, each installation carried multiple label versions for the blue dress. The community sheets determined the label copy as these were progressively updated as more information was gathered or deducted. For each episode the community had the opportunity to change the label information. Different emphasis was placed on the hierarchy or inclusion of specific fields like the designer, date or title, to styling, refashioning or unknown circumstances. The community engaged with the activities of the dress, based on the lack of a known personage and the understanding of the dress as well worn. Unknown label information was highlighted, to encourage community supposition over these fields.

Community labels were distinguished from standard NWM ones. In most instances community fascination revolved around changing the title, breaking up generic formats like the standard Dress c.1950 with descriptors such as *White dress dyed blue c.1950* or *Beautiful dress c.1950*. Similarly, many participants sought to embellish the dress with events like a dinner party, the races or a murder scene.

Participatory curatorial style through interactivity with the community enabled the exhibition to explore the experience of the dress through a spontaneous dynamic of curiosity and recollection. Interactivity allowed for community experimentation with the exhibition model, to ponder over how the exhibition might evolve. I saw the model as a way to address different approaches for looking at curating the idea of embodiment, the circulation of fashion and the transformation of things.





**2.26-2.27**

Community interaction 2005

## THE NOISE OF EVERYDAY LIFE

In this disembodied space of clothing, undressing actions of wear connected fashion to a humble narrative, realised through both ordinary and voyeuristic situations. Intrigued by the potency enabled by the missing person display, I began to test the clothing space further under uncontrolled and transformational conditions. The thriller installations showed striking versions of these investigations; relationships to wear were communicated in quite diverse manifestations. Undressing actions were proposed to discover the dress represented in either contained or chaotic forms. Arrangement within retention devices like a wardrobe, coathanger or box, was contrasted with episodes where the blue dress was haphazardly located on furnishings, machinery or the floor. In these encounters, both abstract and candid, empty clothing extended the perception of surface and the void. Knowing the dress in an intimate and revealing way was enabled by exposing concealed areas like the interior of the dress or its reverse sides. The 'ordinary' aesthetics projected by undressing and the absent body situated the blue dress in everyday circumstances and mixed with the 'thriller' sense of intrigue. Here, I moved away from the curatorial style of exhibition about one state of dress, typically manifested in the dressed mannequin appearance. Instead I playfully considered Carlyle's sense of 'clothing in the world' to capture the diversity of permutations that occur in the life of a dress through showing various dressing appearances as a set of shifting circumstances.

One method of doing this was to question how a dress appeared in an exhibition in order to test what might happen if this arrangement was changed in quite rudimentary ways. I used no special effects or enhancements. In this respect, thriller episodes were raw, applying the undressed state to make more routine dressing associations. In starting to critique the fashion dialogue of the museum I found that what is missing from the fashion dialogue is some semblance or understanding of a sense of wear. This initiated a different type of curatorial process in thinking about the arrangement of the dress. While the dressed state marks the customary fashion appearance the undressed state is one of multiple permutations. I tested whether the object information known by the curator can be made accessible to the community by the arrangement

of the dress. Does, for instance, explicit detail experienced in a garment's configuration capture an essence of wear? I speculated in each thriller episode about these dressing details. Arrangements varied according to the scenic configuration, as I attempted to convey an understanding of clothing occupation. This strategy showed the dress in multiple views and permutations, from revealing stains and alterations to displaying states of untidiness. This reflects perhaps a documentary notion where the reiteration of twelve blue dress states, with often boring or repetitive details shown repeatedly, was able to highlight both difference and sameness in these varied forms. The serialisation of the dress recognised the reality of dressing/wear conditions. It created an expression of wear that departed from the dressed precedent of the museum exhibition that shows clothing in one consistent orientation.

Whether the dress was laid out on the floor, hung in a wardrobe or slumped over in a chair, these events captured the sense and atmosphere of a specific dressing or wear moment. I found the thriller's serial structure gradually constructed an understanding about the dress through these similar yet variant views. In this way, each episode's release anticipated an ongoing interaction with the museum community. The thriller episode made connections to and between each sequence. Even though the dress intrinsically remained the same, it also continued to change under each different set of circumstances. Because of this, fragments of information were gradually accumulated. As the thriller moved towards the climax, expectation grew concerning the exhibition ending and final disclosure of the blue dress.

A particular set of dressing details defined each episode of the curatorial thriller. This created a scenic tension where the changing form of the dress hinted at the discovery of further information or revelations about the wearer. The speculative nature of the thriller episodes was comparable to how facts are established in a forensic investigation through acute observation. Television programs like *CSI investigation* or *Bones*<sup>vii</sup> are popular and engaging partly because of communal participation in resolving their narratives. The interactive model used to construct the exhibition drawn from public responses expanded into thinking about the facts present in each scene and to researching the object through noticing signs about how the dress was worn. Visitors to the exhibition (the museum community) filled out an installation sheet that selected ways for the exhibition to progress and established or supposed particular details about the dress. The curatorial thriller



**2.28-2.31**

Blue dress episode 3

*Unexpected* 2005



## 2.32-2.34

Blue dress episode 4

*Vicarious* 2005

progressed through fantastic invention, supplemented by hard-core facts gained through observational and analytical practices. Perhaps the most deviant gesture in line with investigative techniques occurred in episode 3, *Unexpected*, and was guided by the community script. This scene displayed the dress spread out, face down, on the living room floor of the mill workers' cottage. Suddenly, the unexpected happened. The museum and crime scene merged in this provocative installation of clothing disturbance. Inevitably, episode 3 attracted a notorious status; the community enjoyed this scenario, engrossed by supposition and allegations about 'who dunnit?' I situated the dress, outlined in red tape, within a restricted zone known only through TV crime-scene re-enactments. I decide to highlight the dress in this way to prevent community contamination of the site and to accentuate the misadventure. I recognised the politics associated with a floor exhibit: the 'dangerous' situation also challenges the responsible custodial environment. The disruption led to like-minded excursions in episode 4, *Vicarious*: the scene witnessed the dress slumped over a chair. Members of the community suggested the dress was attacked by some kind of adversary. Both episodes 3 and 4 inadvertently convened a crime investigation, where a team of experts (the community) searched for clues to reconstruct prior events. Forensic techniques rely on interpreting raw information gleaned from precise observation and the testing of material things to recreate the original dire circumstances. To ascertain the thriller's next move, the community studied the dressing details, gestural qualities and spatial configuration to work out the scene or set of circumstances.

Without a body or any living presence in a crime scene, a victim's status and actions are expressed by any remaining personal possessions – particularly clothing. In an artistic response to the forensic scene, contemporary photographer Melanie Pullen's *High fashion crime scenes* portrayed the thriller conceit.<sup>viii</sup> These, however, were occupied scenes, where victims of fatal crimes were dressed up in the latest designer wear. In these images the victim's role is neutralised by their face being obscured. Yet although the settings are morbid, they do not inhibit an observer's delight in checking out the clothing. In this instance the insidious situation disappears or becomes irrelevant: bodily presence is superseded by fashion. In the thriller narrative, I noticed a similar influence. The absence of a physical body in the thriller episodes intensified the viewers' clothing experience and increased their observation of garment details.



**2.35**

Melanie Pullen *Phones* 2005,

C-print from the series

*High Fashion Crime Scenes*.

Published on website

<http://www.melaniepullen.com>





**2.36-2.39**

Detail Blue dress 2005

## WEAR CONDITIONS

*The blue dress* proposed everyday actions of fashion through clothing and wear, setting up quite ordinary details to be sensational. A ruffled petticoat, an undone zipper, an exposed lining or creased surface entertained undressing actions quite whimsically. Material gestures suggested clothing as a shifting form, manifested by textural difference, abstraction, shadowy voids and crevices, inferring a protagonist of some kind. This transformable state and dynamic quality which *The blue dress* studied is analogous to Surrealist expression, where the ‘marvellous’ is seen in the everyday, and quite ordinary objects are invigorated from inanimate beings to vital ones (Martin 1987, p. 50). The imaginative union the Surrealists created between perception and representation suggested that clothing was alive (Martin 1987). From fluid drapery dwelling within a landscape to erotic clothing representation, vacated clothing mimicked affectively the idea of embodiment (Martin 1987). When the blue dress was slouched over in a chair, there was overwhelming community sympathy for a situation of supposed adversity. Similarly, when the dress was arranged inside-out in the wardrobe with flipped-up skirt, it anticipated an object perhaps poised to break loose from confinement. Embodiment was implied by the missing wearer, yet the social space of clothing continued as an occupied place. This interplay between the concealed or revealed body is projected in Dali’s *Night and day clothes of the body* 1936 where abstracted clothing is represented as a living form. Poignantly, the body and clothing are depicted embedded in each other and cannot exist independently, suggestive of clothing as a surrogate human appearance. In the thriller installations, dressing and the wearer were suggested by the transformable clothing space. The blue dress was articulated by varying degrees of animation and exposure. It was displayed differently in each scene, positioned face-up or facedown, with fastenings open or closed, connected with catching a glimpse of a dressing moment – whether the experience of the wearer having just left the scene or the dress as a vital thing. In these episodes I revealed subtle detailing discovered only through partially viewing. Glimpses of how fabric falls when a garment is posed sitting, lying down or stretched out captured a sense of the dress in motion.



**2.40**

Blue dress episode 2

*Tension* 2005



## 2.41

Salvador Dalí

*Night and Day Clothes of the Body* 1936,

gouache, private collection.

Published in Martin (1987)



## 2.42

Blue dress episode 2

*Tension* 2005

What happens to fashion when placed in this undressing environment? In *The blue dress* I contemplate clothing occupation and its affective relationships with other things. My persistent referral to Carlyle (1965) and Barthes (2005) is grounded through expanding the customary expression of fashion practices and actions through an essential understanding of clothing's engagement with the world, which sometimes seem quite disconnected in a fashion exhibition. The thriller's serialisation and the gradual revealment of the blue dress was realised through an unoccupied space. Representation of wear was studied through undressing. The multiple configurations link with actions associated with mundane use. Undressing acts signify an everyday view of domestic life, participation with a familiar world and connectedness to self, family and friends (Bachelard 1994). By working away from formal dressing procedures, undressing brought into play freer interactions and liberal transformations of physical appearance. Indeed, the thriller was never completed, or ever encountered in a fully occupied state in any circumstance. This distraction from dressed forms encapsulated the performative aspect, undressed states unconsciously propelling an imaginative world where unusual and unexpected conditions of the object were revealed or fabricated. Looking back at these various episodes there were some quite ridiculous situations, which arose in juxtaposition to the permanent displays of NWM. For instance, when the blue dress was installed hanging in an open wardrobe, unprotected, lining exposed, it sat opposite a large sign with an ominous warning: THE KICKING OF FOOTBALLS ANYWHERE INSIDE THE MILL GATES IS STRICTLY PROHIBITED. It thus witnessed outside and inside worlds colliding, in a folly only possible in a museum environment.

Amid other practices related to fashion, a similar thriller association and intent of 'everdayness' is elucidated in the contemporary design practices of Cosmic Wonder and Bless, where grand fashion narratives in museum exhibitions are forgone to dialogues about the integration of fashion into a person's life. Bless co-designer Kaag notes: 'Our clothing has no importance in itself; it adjusts to its surroundings ... You can make modifications by having something disappear or adding something else or just taking a different approach' (Poschardt 2006, p. 7). When Bless exhibit their work in a museum, their premise is to document the interiors where Bless products live or lived (Poschardt 2006). Therefore, Bless products are continually located with their original habitats or occupiers. Bless *No.29 Wallscapes 2006*, created for the Boijmanns





**2.43** (lower images)

*Bless no 00-no 29*  
retrospective home run  
Museum Boijmans van Beuningen,  
Rotterdam  
Published in Kaag & Hess (2006)

**2.44-2.45** (upper images)

Cosmic wonder installations  
at Mu museum,  
Eindhoven 2005



van Beuningen Museum, Rotterdam, exhibition, presented realistic large-scale photographs of domestic environments where Bless products are applied. I notice the Bless creation of a 'user' environment in the museum identifies the collective associations of an object to practical engagement with the aesthetics of domesticity. A different approach is taken in *The blue dress* installations where there is an attempt to restore connections to the surroundings of wear by the informal arrangement of one dress.

Cosmic Wonder, in contrast, integrate fashion from an ambiguous position, curating unsettling or aesthetically pleasing relationships between clothing and other things in producing a specific environment. Here, fashion surroundings are conceived as an atmosphere where clothing does not necessarily form a direct relationship to a body but might be abstractly manifested in a tree or across a television or conceived as a curtain. In the guise of an artistic composition, the transformable nature of clothing is displayed as an aesthetic, where the decorative arrangement of abandoned or disembodied clothing is set up in the museum interior. *The Magic village* 2005 installation at the Mu Museum, Eindhoven, for example, is 'the creation of an absurd, unsettling situation' (MU archive 2005). Clothes are represented within larger 'still life' compositions. Garments, arranged to achieve a sensorial impression, evoke intimate responses to the clothes. In this situation fashion is not simply envisioned as a consumable product but viewed as part of a larger social space or aesthetic environment.

*The blue dress* situated fashion in circumstances of dressing abandonment. Fashion in this curatorial model is not a limited experience. Like the fashion practices Bless and Cosmic Wonder I suggested displaying conditions of fashion, represented by the everyday and ordinary aesthetics of dressing. Here, I focused upon the affective relationships formed by clothing to the wearer, other things and surroundings. By questioning representation of states of embodiment in the display trajectory I extended the fashion dialogue from dressed states into wearer conditions and surroundings. I was interested in the collective experience represented by *The blue dress*, a position moving away from highlighting the singularity of a museum exhibit proposed by regularisation of appearance and disconnection from experience. In the imagined world of the thriller I experimented with the experiences formed by fashion surroundings, by enlisting everyday practices associated with wear either encountered as a domestic situation or as a transformational aesthetic.

## MISSING PERSON

In *The blue dress* I explored ways to encounter fashion in an exhibition that was expressive of dressing and wear practices; while I initially studied the concept of appearance, the study extended into thinking about collective experience and surroundings. With this approach I began to critique the regularised states found in a fashion exhibition, such as effigy forms, motionlessness and cosmetic aesthetics. This research started a commentary about both these outward appearances and the essence of appearance.

Cultural historian Elizabeth Wilson observed tensions operating in the exhibition space:

*There is something eerie about a museum of costume. A dusty silence holds still the gowns in the glass cabinets. . . . We experience a sense of the uncanny when we gaze at garments that had an intimate relationship with human beings long since gone to their graves. For clothes are so much part of our living, moving selves that, frozen on display in the mausoleums of culture, they hint at something only half understood, sinister, threatening; the atrophy of the body and the evanescence of life.*

(Wilson 1987, p.1)



**2.46**

*Valentino in Rome,  
45 Years of Style*  
at the Ara Pacis Museum Rome,  
2007 unknown photographer

Wilson's comments are consistently quoted in the field of fashion studies (for example Blau 1999; Craik 1994; Entwistle 2007; O'Neil 2008); although indifferent towards the museum situation, she has focused upon the intrinsic relationship between the body and clothing, reminding us about human occupation of the clothing space (Carlyle 1965). Museum representation, she believed, caused a disjunction where clothing was no longer viewed as a vessel of life, but perceived as a souvenir of death. Wilson's perception of how clothing is encountered reflects more about the things we don't see, or will never see; it acknowledges clothing's significance in our knowledge of these things. The thriller installations interrogated these states of being, in both temporal and spatial conditions. In some ways my research expands Wilson's 'dusty silence' by studying the clothing entity through fashion actions of embodiment. As each exhibition scene progressed, so did the ways we know the dress. This happens through repeated dress encounters posed in vacated states and supposed through varying circumstances. Embodiment therefore presented itself through displaced presence, as the garment represented the absent wearer yet retained the memory and form of prior or potential occupations. In this coexistence of absence and presence an ambiguous duality of meaning was implied in the representational form.

A fundamental component of this research, emphasised by the thriller, was the search for a missing person — the wearer. The blue dress, presented through abandoned states, was intended to erase appearances formed by any contrived body substitution. Clothing arranged on a mannequin form abides by regularised aesthetics and a supposed sense of lifelessness. A condition of sameness and inanimate forms is a repeated concern expressed about museum practice in clothing display. Fashion appearances in clothing showing a particular design style, historical moment or technical innovations are generally represented on an appropriate mannequin form. Use of mannequins is a recommended museum practice for clothing display (Arnold 1973; Cumming 2004; de la Haye & Clark 2008; ICOM 1994; Tarrant 1996; Taylor 2002), to support the garment and provide an accurate fashion silhouette. This simulation of a bodily presence is possibly an expression of realism. The display medium is designed to accurately convey an authentic fashion or clothing encounter through dressing re-enactment. It is not surprising that the waxworks exhibition was

greatly influential in the development of the fashion exhibition (Sandberg 2003; Taylor 2002); the model established a tableaux format and semblance of realism. Waxworks defined fashion as an essential temporal mechanism, a basic model recording celebrity appearances and their dress over time. In this elucidation mannequins purveyed a deathly and inert fashion rendering.

In the museum, Taylor argues, the 'whole range of human experience attached to the wearing of clothes is inevitably lost on the static dummy placed behind glass. The challenge for the curator and exhibition designer is to try and revive it' (2002, p. 24). In Taylor's account a mannequin is cast as an effigy, a dead representation, associated with a wearer's memory. However, the mannequin is also an established merchandising device, which idealises the human form to show off a garment's exterior view (Vinken 2005, p. 141). Clothing on a mannequin is ultimately understood from a window-dressing perspective: an endorsement for a new product. Studying the mannequin role was an important element in this project, both in generation of display aesthetics and dissemination of fashion. In the name of wearer realism, wearer memorialisation or wearer promotion, mannequins act to regularise clothing appearances and control wearer environments. In *The blue dress*, I speculated about whether a fashion exhibition is concerned with an understanding of wear/dressing or whether a dressed mannequin ostensibly removes all traces of dressing (Barthes 2006). In the thriller installations, therefore, I challenged the mannequin state; my exploratory undressing looked to discover other dressing/wear conditions.

Discussion about museum conditions tested in the blue dress installations progressed into dialogues drawn from contemporary fashion design practices about representational form, and the dichotomy drawn between living and dead phenomena. This continual desire to animate clothes, to make connections to the body, to form a living engagement with the object, has been an ongoing enquiry for fashion practitioners and curators. To enliven clothing, notions of dressing or wear are explored through representation by live, virtual, simulated or metaphoric means. In the thriller, I used the absent wearer to draw attention to dressing scenarios, a speculative process applied to address different states of fashion.







**2.48** (far left)

*Issey Miyake Making Things*

Cartier Foundation

for Contemporary art, Paris 1998

Published on website

<http://fondation.cartier.com>

**2.47** (middle)

*Pain couture by Jean Paul Gaultier*

Cartier Foundation

for Contemporary art, Paris 2004

photograph by Stefano Pandini

Published on website

<http://fondation.cartier.com>

**2.49** (right)

*Correspondences Yohji Yamamoto*

Gallery of Modern Art,

Palazzo Pitti Florence 2005

Published in Bonnet (2006)

Invigorating fashion is promoted at the Victoria and Albert Museum, London (V&A), in the *Fashion in motion* program (Anderson 2000; Taylor 2002), where live catwalk parades are held alongside static displays,<sup>ix</sup> while at the London Museum an eighteenth-century dress is activated by 3D computer graphic animation (Museum of London Group 2004). Bath's fashion museum installed a communal dressing-up area, where replica corsets and crinolines can be tried on and dressing sensations captured. In contrast to these institutional tactics, further research into representation of wear has happened through extending design practices. In the work of French fashion designer Jean Paul Gaultier, for instance, transience was the design solution to offset states of museum permanence. In collaboration with French bakers in 'a living exhibition', Gaultier's most famous clothing designs were kneaded, crafted and baked. Poignantly, as the dough garments harden they eventually turn to crumbs (Menkes 2004) and leave nothing to archive. Advanced technology like electronics and robotics is a means for designers to give garments individual control. The Miyake studio caused the body to disappear while clothing took on a life of its own in *Making things* (1999) (Mears 2008; Taylor 2002). Clothes moved and jumped, independently. Electronic sensors activated by visitors' movements animated the clothes and immersed the museum community in a range of dressing sensations. Similar to this representation is Chalayan's remote control dress from Before Minus Now s/s 2000 collection (van Kooji 2005): a garment capable of independent movement that made the body's capacity to propel movement obsolete, moved away from an embodied expression of wear into one artificially creating the sensation of wear

In the thriller installations, undressing scenarios proposed situations that produced an experience of wear. The desire to touch and to try on, to wear, the clothes is a tension ever present in any fashion exhibition. With *The blue dress* I aimed to create a sense of dressing through an atmospheric encounter. Precedents for the blue dress speculations can be found in the Yohji Yamamoto exhibition triptych staged between 2005 and 2006, in Florence, Paris and Antwerp, that suggested the sensorial dress experiences set in varied fashion circumstances. The triptych positioned the fashion exhibition in display surroundings of the fine art museum, atelier or shop. The designer Yamamoto generously allowed unrestricted community access to his archival collection that allowed interactive engagement with the clothes, normally not possible under



**2.50**

*Yohji Yamamoto Dream Shop,*

MoMu Antwerp 2006

Published in Bonnet (2006)





**2.51**

*Yohji Yamamoto Dream Shop*

Try me on label

Published in Bonnet (2006)

customary museum conditions. In *Correspondences* at the Gallery of Modern Art, Palazzo Pitti, Florence, fashion was transposed in the gallery's permanent collection of fine art and placed outside the protection of glass showcases. Liberated clothes were intimately encountered, touched and smelled (Bonnet 2006). In the Paris exhibition, *Just clothes* (Juste de vêtements), at the Musée de la Mode du Textile, garments from the museum's collection were displayed behind glass cases, while garments from Yamamoto's archive were available for closer scrutiny. However, *Dream shop* installed at the Antwerp exhibition expressed the most extreme performative aspect of this series, offering actual dressing opportunities Yamamoto garments were made available to wear, with 'TRY ME ON' labels attached to certain clothes. The Antwerp exhibition was an immersive interaction that invited the museum community to cross over from voyeur to wearer. This model brought into the exhibition dialogue discussions about the affect of wearing clothes and how people feel about this. The haptic experience of fashion Caroline Evans has noted is one generally overlooked (2005). The exhibition website articulated the benefits of this unique scenario; dressing made possible the opportunity to know the designer's work by experiencing the intimate workings and virtuosity of the garment's form (MoMu 2006, exhibition archives section).

The *Dream shop* was a provocative museum intervention, an expression of dressing rituals from personal selection and consumption to sensation. The museum transformed into a shop, the archive transformed into a personal wardrobe and the museum community dressing up in the exhibits was a fanciful design. The exhibition situation violated the typical custodial relationship of the museum in facilitation of a haptic experience. Bonnet notes *Dream shop* 'has given birth to a type of exhibition that did not previously exist and perhaps will not exist again' (2006, p. 12). In *The blue dress* I proposed studying wear without trying on clothes physically. In the arrangement of one garment, the thriller sought to test capacities of gesture, sensuousness and absence to evoke associations to dressing practices. Although museum practice has favoured mannequin devices, I wanted to experiment with the undressed display to communicate or provoke personal connections to the blue dress and the actions of fashion if represented. In the first exhibition I speculated about the ways fashion exhibitions might present a sense of dressing or wear suggested by diverse clothing relationships and states of embodiment.

## CLIMAX

*The blue dress* successfully captivated audiences, drawing community attention and assistance in finding out more about the dress. Although NWM voluntary guides were probably the only participants to experience the entire thriller, each episode was designed to also act independently. The thriller atmosphere was sustained, however, by maintaining the previous installations throughout the museum. These abandoned sites remained, littering the museum and forming an intriguing trail where the community might unexpectedly discover former blue dress occupations. The 'Blind dating' workshop, held just before the thriller finale, was the only public discussion about the project. It was an opportunity to share accumulated histories. By this stage there were some strong hypotheses about the dress. The blind dating association continued the theme of social networking that had started with the original exhibition advertisements and the premise for getting to know the dress through participatory means.

Gathering information about the dress had followed the path of the thriller in providing an open narrative, which progressively built up various meanings and viewpoints. In the installations the dress was presented in surroundings of museum, domestic and technological circumstances. In this way the development of the thriller investigated diverse relationships to the dress from how it entered the museum to the way it was worn, refashioned and documented.

Indeed, thriller scripts proposed many riveting scenarios. In episode 3 of the curatorial thriller, *Unexpected*,<sup>x</sup> the community was split, with the possible protagonist or wearer identified either as an old lady or as a teenage bride. In episode 4, *Improbable*,<sup>xi</sup> there was much speculation about the origins of the dress; suppositions ranging from it having been dumped in an old suitcase to the possibility of a curse being upon it. In episode 5, *Deception*, the dress was placed in the fabric dyeing display, and there were various suppositions about a former identity, the possibility of an extreme colour makeover. The dating workshop interrupted the thriller narrative: the dress was laid out on a table for viewing and discussion.





## 2.52-2.54

Blue dress episode 1,  
episode 3,  
episode 5 abandoned sites 2005

Several volunteer guides attended to share their theories about the work. Progressive research about the object opened up some astute observations and conclusions from the museum community. The major revelation concerned the transformations the dress had undergone. Perhaps this one dress had a variety of circumstances to take into account. Common observations concerned multiple wearers, changes in function from wedding dress to dress-up and the refashioning processes. Fixing the object into a particular timeframe attracted the most interest, including an interview on ABC radio. The curatorial process – reading the garment through construction and identification of materials and fabrication detail to ascertain information – generally happens behind the scenes. Here, the community was involved in some museum processes, including public observation of each episode being prepared and dismantled. In this way, the thriller transformed museum processes into an engaging community encounter. Assembling data about tulle petticoats, the zipper, fabric drapery and various fictions enabled engagement with identification. The curator's authority in driving the research and authentication of data about the blue dress was shared; unknown aspects were speculative drivers, which inspired the community to fill in the gaps. The blue dress was proposed to tantalise the viewer through ordinary aesthetics, unforeseen juxtapositions and secret links to an unknown wearer. After the blind dating workshop the dress returned to display for the final installation. By the final episode, the blue dress was only partially glimpsed through a niche window on the upper floor and no one was quite sure how the thriller might end.

Reviewing the exhibition, I found *The blue dress* thriller worked to show curatorial practices through a participatory network, in viewers getting to know an object. In reflection about this framework, I noticed that positioning fashion through undressing and the thriller construct successfully put forward the idea of the protagonist: clothing as an occupied space. I was amazed that only a couple of respondents suggested the dress should be displayed on a mannequin form. The undressings were popular possibly because of the variety of readings they exposed.

Throughout the exhibition I maintained the integrity of museum processes, although the intensity of preparing each episode was demanding and involved limited long-term planning or pre-determined states. The project did manage to challenge the look of displays, the consistency and sameness of the way clothing



**2.55**

Blue dress 6  
*Climax 2005*



**2.56**

Blue dress 6  
 Climax 2005

is presented. The unpredictable nature of these manifestations was attractive because it contrasted with more formulaic presentation modes. Through the thriller I tested various configurations and subsequent dress readings, and generated quite diverse community responses to each episode. I noticed that when the blue dress was sited in a containment vessel community reaction to the display was less intense than it was to more haphazard configurations. Multiple viewpoints, especially interior sightings, were also potent. As I thought about how a sense of the wearer was expressed through arrangement of the dress, the configurations of the dress started to explore the meanings conveyed. Here I questioned how object placement affected the museum experience and possibly changed community understanding of the dress. The participatory curation revealed a fascination from the community in the dressing dialogue. The expressive details proposed by dressing gestures suggested a language of fashion that is rarely explored in the museum. This discovery supported a curatorial model for conveying a sense of fashion activities through the experience of a diversity of dress appearances and meanings. This is a key discovery in the research process.

At the beginning I was anxious about the serialisation of one object, fearing that repetitiveness would become tedious. As it transpired, each episode evolved in quite a distinct way, with anticipation growing about each new instalment from either the discovery of new associations or viewpoints about the dress. I employed the restriction of curating the only example of fashionable dress at the NWM to study fashion from a fresh perspective. Under the guise of a thriller I was able to focus upon the appearance of one dress and study the diversity of circumstances that could be represented through it. The singularity of the dress was proposed to represent the social space or activities of fashion. Circulation of the dress by the wearer was expressed by dressing actions/arrangements to communicate the 'worldliness' of fashion. I was interested in a range of experiences that could be used to express the wearer. This resulted in my developing a curatorial model that engaged with the diversity of fashion through multiple readings of one dress, aided by the participatory community process. The idea of studying the interpretation and display of one object in multiple ways was discussed by the curators Amy de la Haye and Judith Clark in the London College of Fashion Centenary conference in 2006 (2008). Their exhibition titled *Exploding one object*, planned for 2009 at the Brighton Museum (de la Haye & Clark 2008), is about the material analysis and display of Women's Land

Army breeches. This exhibition aims to represent a range of contexts and display permutations and adopts a similar premise to the curatorial thriller: de la Haye and Clark investigate the role of museum interpretation and display models in communicating the experience of an object. In the thriller premise, however, I also addressed more abstract notions concerned with the nature of appearances, surroundings and experience. In the serialisation of one object I provoked the customary exhibition modes or curatorial practices of the dressed form for the representation of fashion. *The blue dress* model is a speculative one from which to critique existing practices in the field.

I had hoped there would be an opportunity to develop a multimedia component for the project but the museum had a low technological capacity. Certainly, the ordinary aesthetics of the project reinforced engagement with the everyday circumstances surrounding fashion. The fact-fiction duality served to engage the community in a non-authoritative manner. Imaginings about the dress induced a familiarity and connectedness to surroundings. By the final episode, it became less important to distinguish between the real and make-believe notions about the dress or to acknowledge that both were present. The thriller sought to find the wearer, to consider how embodiment might be realised in a fashion exhibition through metaphoric, visual appearances, community encounters and signification. I realised conditions of embodiment, the sense of clothing as a social space, could possibly be invited through allowing the dress to be viewed in various arrangements. This expression of wear was an experiment that tested how the dress might be curated and encountered. It directed my research to understand fashion through actions and to consider clothing as a social space vitally connected to many things.

Although *The blue dress* installation portrayed a familiar fashion aesthetic through an undressing paradigm, I recognise that this was perhaps not convincing or successful for everyone. At times the museum community found the domestic context proposed by an unresolved experience confronting. The aesthetic appeared uncontrolled and perhaps required further explanation. However, this exhibition had a profound impact upon my practice. I found the transformational nature of clothing in museum practice to be an under-researched area, and exploration of the clothing space acted eloquently to reveal a language of fashion rarely experienced in museum displays.





2.57

Blue dress episode 1  
*Identity crisis* 2005

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- 2.51      *Yohji Yamamoto dream shop* Try me on label Published in Bonnet (2006)
- 2.52-54   Blue dress episode 1, episode 3, episode 5 abandoned sites 2005
- 2.55-56   Blue dress episode 6 *Climax* 2005
- 2.57      Blue dress episode 1 *Identity crisis* 2005

## ENDNOTES

- <sup>i</sup> Curator and exhibition co-ordinator Anthea van Kopplen, appointed in 2004, instigated a new exhibition program and invited a number of curators and artists to participate.
- <sup>ii</sup> Architectural firm McGlashan Everist, based in Geelong and Melbourne, established in 1954 by David McGlashan and Neil Everist. accessed 13 February 2008 <[http: www.mearchitects.com.au](http://www.mearchitects.com.au)>.
- <sup>iii</sup> The National Wool Museum was established to position Geelong as a major cultural heritage destination.
- <sup>iv</sup> Presented without a mannequin form in six installations, alternative methods were used to support the dress within the guidelines and ethical standards provided by International Committee of Museums (ICOM) and Museum Australia. Periods of display were short, light levels monitored, and handling minimised.
- <sup>v</sup> Michael Jackson *Thriller* 1982, written by Rod Temperton, produced by Quincy Jones; the single came from Jackson's *Thriller* album released in 1982.
- <sup>vi</sup> Thirty responses were received for development of episode 2

<sup>vii</sup> American television series, based on solving crimes through forensic investigation, CSI (Crime Scene Investigation) aired from 2000, while Bones, started in 2005, is specifically concerned with FBI cases about human remains.

<sup>viii</sup> *Evidence and low life* by Luc Sante depicts crime scene photographs of murders and suicides from the New York City police files 1914–1918. The staging mechanism for Pullen's work is photographs set up from original crime scene documentation.

<sup>ix</sup> Fashion in motion, live catwalk events.  
<[http://www.vam.ac.uk/collections/fashion/fashion\\_motion/index.html](http://www.vam.ac.uk/collections/fashion/fashion_motion/index.html)>

<sup>x</sup> Twenty-two responses were received for development of episode 3.

<sup>xi</sup> Twelve responses were received for the development of episode 4.





# IN TATTERS

132	Wear and tear
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*I never fall apart  
because I never fall together*

Andy Warhol

## WEAR AND TEAR

The second exhibition emerged from the fashion repository of the National Trust of Australia (Victoria), a collection known for its extensive holdings of nineteenth-century materials. Here, I was curious to curate the varied appearances found in the Trust collection. How does the nature of collecting and museum selection engage with the most ‘loved’ or ‘worn’ fashionable clothing and convey a sense of being ‘in fashion’?

Studying these conditions allows speculation about the realisation and selection of ideal states, which determine an object’s survival or disappearance in a museum (Roche 1994) and the responsiveness of these custodial actions in representing dressing/wear relations.

In this study I suggest the museum provides a fractured reading of fashion through dressing/wear activities articulated in the experience of new or well-preserved remains and, through this second exhibition, suggest another reading.

Museum selection processes, motions of rejecting or collecting, preserving or letting material fade away, assemble the particular characteristics of any collection. Sharon McDonald writes that the collection is a series of relations:

Collecting is a set of distinctive – though also variable and changing – practices that not only produces knowledge about objects but also configures particular ways of knowing and perceiving. It is a culturally recognized way of ‘doing’ – or rehearsing – certain relations between things and people.

(McDonald 2006, pp. 94–95)

The relations in the National Trust collection are local ones; the material has largely been donated, with many items made or worn by people from Melbourne or the state of Victoria.

The history of the collection and its development proposes an engagement with fashion closely aligned

to a set of community relationships. Maynard (1994) has argued that there is a lack of representation in museum collections of everyday practices of dress. However, in the National Trust repository I noticed diversity in collecting and dressing practices that represent those neglected local dress histories and acts described in Maynard's writing. In the 1960s, the collection developed partly in response to the sparse representation of local design and dress practices. At this stage, neither the National Gallery of Victoria nor the Museum of Victoria actively collected local fashion. The National Gallery of Victoria – the state's major repository of fashion and textiles – only collected garments designed by French couturiers and historic European embroidery and lace. These items were purchased mainly through international consultants and auction houses (Healy 1993). Inadvertently, these collection habits encouraged the growth of the National Trust collection and aided Trust acquisition of Australian-provenance garments that had previously been rejected by state museums. Details about the clothes and their owners recorded in the diaries of Mrs Elizabeth Goss, who worked at the Trust from 1956, reveal an extraordinary collection of dressing histories from Government House soirees to the gold fields of Ballarat. The holdings are only occasionally exhibited or published and therefore are seldom experienced outside storage. In 1990, the collection moved from the nineteenth-century mansion, Illawarra House, in the affluent Melbourne suburb of Toorak, to a 'new' repository in the high fashion retail district of Melbourne's CBD – the former Figgins Diorama and Shop of Shops at 171 Collins Street (Healy 2006b). Items from the collection are sometimes displayed in the National Trust properties of Rippon Lea mansion and Como House and infrequent 'treasures' exhibitions show off predominately nineteenth-century materials. These are exhibitions designed for lobbying reasons, to gather support for a permanent collection home and facilities for conservation and display.

In 1994, the *Memories of Melbourne* exhibition was staged in a suburban shopping mall and set about publicising the collection to the wider community. The exhibition, oddly positioned in the main food hall, displayed nineteenth-century garments cast against a backdrop of meat and delicatessen goods. The heavily populated public space placed the collection away from the traditional elite environs of the museum. However, in the consumer landscape of the shopping mall the curator conversed with new associations

(Ridsdale 1994). In the domain of mass consumption and entertainment the exhibition encompassed the extensive social networks proposed by fashionable dress. I imagine the inclusion of a nineteenth-century dining room table amidst mannequins dressed in historic garments and a backdrop of butcher shops acted as a performance device to unite the communal conviviality of dressing up and eating. Reviewing images of this exhibition, I speculated about the community interface proposed by its radical intervention and absurd orientation. For the passerby, in this reading there is a disparity between fashion relationships and the real garment. How the community engages with fashion in this situation is disrupted by the rendering proposed by the display aesthetics of the historic house transposed into the mall. The installation exposes a seeming lack of empathy in relating location, surroundings and the clothing form to a dressing experience.

The promotional images for the exhibition are archival ones, reissued from 1960s' originals by the leading Melbourne photography studio of Athol Shmith, a specialist in social portraiture and fashion (Ennis 2004). The images follow a nineteenth-century studio style, with garments worn by living models set against a painted illusory backdrop. This practice, prevalent in the 1960s although no longer endorsed by museum associations (ICOM 1985; Taylor 2002), is an awkward conceit of embodiment. Props of autumn leaves scattered on the studio floor possibly symbolise the ageing dress from the Trust collection. The re-enactment or semblance of wearing fashion attempts to connect again with the social actions seemingly lost in the museum collection. Unresolved elements in the *Memories of Melbourne* exhibition are typical of a historical mode of display and reinforce my questioning about how the wear of fashion is staged.

In 2005, changes to the Trust curatorial team led to increased exposure of the collection and to the start of a dedicated exhibition program. The curatorial style shifted from an emphasis on lobbying and promotion, and predilection for nineteenth-century history, to one conversant with articulating local practices. The first major exhibition organised by Trust curators in this mode was *Fabulous: exquisite Melbourne fashions of the '60s*, curated by Elizabeth Anya-Petrivna and Katie Symons. The practice of twentieth-century embroidery designer Nellie Van Rysoort and her label, Fabienne, was presented for the first time, installed at Como House (a site discussed in detail later in the text). Here, the National Trust collection was combined with





### 3.1-3.2

*Memories of Melbourne,*  
Westfield Southland shopping centre 1994



**3.3**

Athol Shmith Studio,

*Afternoon gown,*

worn in 1875

by Mrs Jane Louise Ballantyne,  
from the National Trust collection,

Como, South Yarra,  
gelatin silver photograph 1960s

loans from private and public collections. Garments, embroideries and designs took over a series of rooms. Experimentation with the display aesthetics of the museum house and the surroundings produced connections between the exhibition, the people and the place. The exhibition permeated the house. Projections of fashion imagery, photos of clients and dress patterns veiled the historic interiors, while soundscapes of various participants' voices filled the rooms. The minutiae and flamboyant details of fashion were captured across various media to evoke a kaleidoscopic experience. The positioning of mannequins dramatically altered the regular interior layout of each room, while projections embroidered the rooms, mimicking the detail on the garments. In this exhibition, the curators provocatively played with developing associations between fashion and the surroundings through an immersive decorative scheme, breaking down the National Trust's traditional curatorial and exhibition schemes for fashion display.

At the same time as the launch of the *Fabulous* exhibition I began visiting the National Trust store to research an exhibition about fancy dress. While accessing the collection, I suggested a collaborative project, stimulated by the recent directions of the National Trust in experimenting with curatorial models for fashion. This led to the second exhibition and established my ongoing advisory relationship with the Trust. However, during these early excursions to the store I gradually moved away from looking for specific exhibition subjects to studying the condition of things. Scattered across the National Trust wardrobe is a curious assortment of once-fashionable items undergoing a destructive yet oddly attractive kind of metamorphosis. Clothing in these varied states are compelling documents of wear. The collection represents much more than simply *what* people wore. The range of clothing conditions conveyed experiences about *how* they are worn. Peter Stallybrass argues that the material memories of clothing (1992, 1998; Jones & Stallybrass 2000) and the traces left on garments recollect intimate and domestic dressing situations. For example, Stallybrass notes that in the nineteenth-century clothing trade wrinkles or creases in the elbow of a sleeve were called 'memories' (1998, p. 196): impressions recording the various interactions between the wearer and the garment. However, when the garment was exchanged for money at the pawnbroker the 'memory', or personal connection in the garment, devalued its worth. In a similar way, signs on clothing in the National Trust store



### 3.4

Fabulous: *exquisite Melbourne fashions of the '60s*,  
Como House and Garden 2005





3.5

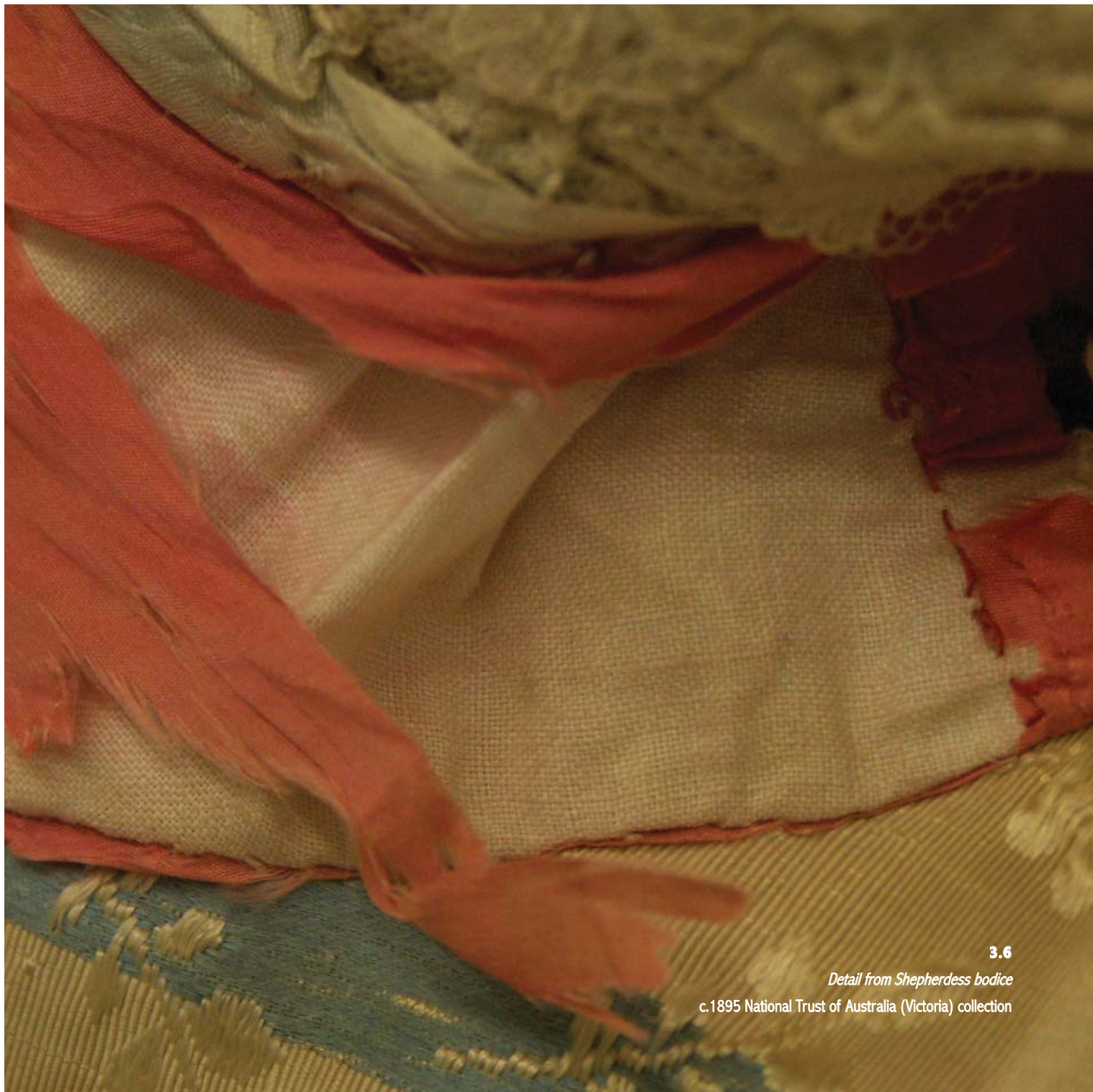
*Shepherdess bodice*

c.1895 National Trust of Australia (Victoria) collection

encapsulate the action and effect of wear and the wearer but do not necessarily equate with museum values of appearance. The collection in this state does, however, communicate fashion by representing the memory of dressing practices; the presence of the wearer is embedded in the clothes.

Garments in authentic states show signs of change from temporal and spatial conditions. These are natural appearances, unaltered by museum interference, in states neither conserved nor manipulated for display. Vitality is read in the decomposing surfaces and I noticed that in these undisturbed circumstances, bodily imprints and variation of form described past actions, documenting the experiences of fashion both physically and poetically. Dirk Lauwaert considers dressing practices as a rite of passage: 'People learned to dress themselves the way they learned to express themselves in language, in play, from mother to daughter, from father to son. Moreover, making clothes was once a part of getting dressed' (2002, p. 47). Although the maker and wearer are distinct in contemporary fashion practice, I was drawn to the way the National Trust collection reminded us about the range of dressing practices inherent in a garment. The divergence in collecting practices of the Trust intuitively captured the poetic and destructive breakdown of clothes, a situation noted by fashion historian Juliette Peers when she described the Trust collection as 'a repository for many items which otherwise might have been discarded' (Struthers & Peers 1990, p. 2).

In a public fashion collection standard custodial actions respond to criteria informed by the processes of selection, arrangement and preservation. The museum display aspires to present the original intent of a garment by displaying it in an attractive and ostensibly 'like new' semblance. In both public and domestic wardrobes common reactions to variable clothing conditions caused by wear are abandonment, concealment or preservation. The accumulation of garments in extreme transformational states preserves items previously not considered collectable or desirable. Eroded appearances caused by dressing practices and temporal change convey quite different experiences of fashion. There is something confronting and haunting about the breakdown of old clothes. The deterioration I discover in the storeroom viewings echo the bizarre, stereotypical image of Miss Havisham, a character defined by her withered, yellowed wedding dress, a ghastly cliché about the fate of old clothes imitating their wearer. The presence of the wearer lingers in



**3.6**

*Detail from Shepherdess bodice*

c.1895 National Trust of Australia (Victoria) collection



the clothing form even though the body has long departed (Carlyle 1965). Inclusion of 'old' garments in a museum collection implies the vestiges caused by time will be stopped. Clothes are often retained in private wardrobes when they are no longer worn, or when they are worn out, as reminders of relationships to specific people or events (Banim & Guy 2001; de la Haye, Taylor & Thompson 2006). Often, donations to a museum collection are acts of personal responsibility initiated to preserve the memory of the wearer in a revitalised clothing form. Gifting an item sometimes occurs in anticipation of halting rapid change. Maintenance of the original appearance is implied by acceptance into the museum environment of custodial maintenance and protection. However, preserving the appearance of a used garment is an onerous duty (Taylor 2002, Palmer 2008a); deteriorating conditions require intensive conservation treatments to slow down and revitalise the effects of temporal and spatial change.

In the National Trust storeroom, amongst hundreds of items, I was deeply touched by the sight of degraded clothes and the potency of these transformations. Encounters with varied states of clothing initiated my reflection about the impermanence of fashion and how this can be experienced away from the protected environment of storage. Although the garments are actively breaking down, I was not concerned about halting these passages and did not propose turning back the process by remedial actions. Instead, I found traces of dressing and atrophic states could communicate a powerful sense of wearing and the wear of fashion.

The study of ruins and the aesthetics of decay in Western cultural traditions offer a parallel link for studying fashionable clothes both in the appreciation of this transformation and in the cultural values posed by the shifting occurrence. Similarities between buildings and clothes relate to human occupation. The degrading forces of time, the impermanency of existence and the shifting aesthetics caused by these transformations that are studied in architectural ruins (Roth 1997, Woodward 2001) have a resonance with the study of old clothes. For example, Caroline Evans noted the sense of melancholy in the work of contemporary designers reusing second-hand clothes and alluded to the Romantic cult of ruins by designers who select 'objects imbued with a fragile sense of loss' (2003, p. 258). The emotional association, the poetics aroused by



### 3.7

#### *Pip and Miss Havisham*

illustrated by Charles Green, *Great Expectations*

Gadshill edition, London, 1897-1908

Published at [www.victorianweb.org/art](http://www.victorianweb.org/art)

[/illustration/green/3.html](http://www.victorianweb.org/art/illustration/green/3.html)

### 3.8

#### *Miss Havisham*

illustrated by Charles Green, *Great Expectations*

Gadshill edition, London, 1897-1908.

Published at [www.victorianweb.org/art](http://www.victorianweb.org/art)

[/illustration/green/2.html](http://www.victorianweb.org/art/illustration/green/2.html)



### 3.9

Giovanni Piranesi

*Ancient altar*

c.1743 etching,

Collection Auckland Art Gallery,

New Zealand

the deteriorating condition of clothes, stimulates a situation that blurs the visual boundaries established by exhibition conditions. I wished to test these elements further in the curation of 'old' fashion, where the garments have evolved into something else, and I was mindful of Bradley Quinn's comments about the memories ruins evoke – 'whether real or imagined, they indulge the viewer in the fantasy of creation' (2003, p. 66) – and the poetic fantasies of ruins represented by the eighteenth-century artist and architect Giovanni Piranesi.

In considering the state of impermanence, or the ephemeral, depicted in 'past' fashion, I suggested to impart a counterpoint or parallel act to extend our understanding of fashion from the customary spectacle of the new (Benjamin 2004; Lehmann 2000) or fashion known in images (Barthes 1985; McNeil 2008) to fashion known by social actions. I put forward a curatorial model based on the spectacle of 'worn' appearance to explore how fashion can be conveyed by the experience of use. In order to begin the critique in this project I embraced the changing states of fashionable clothing.

To the National Trust executive I proposed to curate an exhibition about the consumption of fashion in collaboration with their collection curators. The exhibition would be concerned with fashion represented by the continuous circumstances and processes of wear; the depiction of transformational states triggered by either natural or constructed environments. In presenting fashion consumption through a dialogue of wear, I set about reviewing generalised museum appearances. I sought to articulate an expression of idiosyncratic states and distinctiveness of appearance by showing the breakdown and irreversible change of things. In this departure, the research path started to review the hierarchy of appearances prevalent in museum practices, the maintenance of objects consistently revived to represent a state of 'newness' or 'completeness'.

In the recontextualisation of objects in the museum, new relationships are formed with other objects (McDonald 2006). In the exhibition translation, the museum aesthetic and containment processes filter the appearance of the object's form. In this way, public collections progressively eliminate the idea of use (Baudrillard 2007; Stewart 1993). The museum situation changes appearances and consistently dilutes

everyday connections to wear. The custodial actions of selection, arrangement and preservation aspire to represent fashion through the imagery and associations created by 'attractive' looking clothes. In the National Trust exhibition, then, I planned to reactivate or expose a sense of social connectedness to wear by revealing diverse appearances. In this model I was concerned with providing an alternative experience to the eradication of use or the curatorial style of 'merchandising' aesthetics. Christopher Breward noted this curatorial style in the Giorgio Armani exhibition held in 2003 at London's Royal Academy, where he argued that these display circumstances elevate clothes 'to the status of iconic art pieces' and that 'the exhibits were presented as decontextualised objects for aesthetic appreciation. Grouped according to style and colour, the creative and commercial development of Armani's output was impossible to follow' (Breward 2003, para. 7). The situation of museum sameness recognised in postmodern fetishism (Baudrillard 2007) supposes similar and repeated fashion encounters are experienced in the abstraction and objectification of clothes. However, an intrinsic part of fashion's social connectivity is eroded and continually erased. According to Efrat Tseëlon, the changes to signification implied by postmodern fetishism altered the meaning of fashion from a system of sophisticated communication to one of entertainment by 'subverting the visual code from a language to a spectacle' (1994, p. 128). I argue, therefore, that the regularisation of fashionable clothes' appearances in the museum acts to remove any sense of dressing and any expression of the nuances created by the dressed act.

In my search for alternative/missing dialogues, I questioned the dilution of the fashion experience by proposing the articulation of wear in exhibition making and curation. I saw this new position as a parallel practice, one that was not oppositional to understanding fashion as pleasure or to reading the visual culture of the exhibition as an extension to the magazine, catwalk or retail experience. However, if fashion is explored in relation to wear through the representation of the 'used garment' (Barthes 1985), another form of consumption is also considered. In this model the primacy of the fashion object is directed to circumstances of embodiment and social connectivity evidenced by use. The diversity of fashion communicated by wear reveals changing conditions and situations of the fashionable clothing form. I noted Igor Kopytoff's research

into the 'cultural biography of things' (1986), observations about the particular events that frame our relations to an object. This method engages with the life of an object, the variable conditions shifting from age, function, ownership, cultural context or social engagement. I argue that 'wear' studies in a similar way the life or currency of fashion, the changes that occur and the inevitable obsolescence of style and form over time.

In this regard, Amy de la Haye argued the character of the Cecil Beaton collection of fashion at the V&A was unique because it was a collection of worn clothes, garments designed by leading couture houses but sourced from the wardrobes of major clients (2006, p. 131). In this scenario the 'named' identity of the wearer is of key importance and their design connoisseurship recognised; however, the private source of exhibits does not necessarily provide any key understanding of the wearing. In the sparse attention given to dressing and wear interactions in studies of fashion, Paul Sweetman writes, 'The body in fashion is simply a mannequin or shop-window dummy – it is the clothing, rather than the wearing of it, that is regarded as significant' (2001, p. 57). In the museum, where the focus is drawn around the object, I noticed the changing appearances of clothing elucidated a certain dialogue of wear. I sought to test this experience in the public domain of an exhibition, to encounter varied states of fashion noticed in a collection of old clothes as a curatorial model for articulating a sense of clothing circulation, consumption and the individualisation of wear.



## FASHION AND DECAY

Displaying fashion in states of dilapidation is, I realise, an extreme exhibition scenario, a disturbing institutional proposition. In taking on this complicated curatorial direction I unwittingly devised an exhibition model in reversal of custodial practices. Exchange of fashion representational conditions constructs an alternate dialogue, one extending into discussions and decisions affecting display methods and the exhibition site. How does fashion exhibit wear? What are the circumstances or surroundings suitable for curating 'worn out' manifestations? Museum interactions made by the artist Andy Warhol, both as a collector and curator, are pertinent to this enquiry; in particular his desire to assemble and exhibit artefacts expressive of user sensibilities. Warhol's curatorial intervention *Raid the Icebox 1* was a speculative project that questioned the characteristics of museum practices, the role of connoisseurship (Bright 2001) and exhibition modes. In drawing an exhibition from across the museum holdings, Warhol amalgamated various media and conditions. In this way, he blurred museum distinctions between the states of masterpiece or fake, storage or display, fashion or painting; instead, these classifications were randomly transgressed. Entire collections of objects contained in storage vessels were exhibited, objects sat generically arranged in disparate conditions with no special preparation. Warhol was attracted to the authentic states of storage, his accumulation of particular artefacts emphasised instances of untidiness and misadventure associated with a personal space that contrasted with the museum's sense of order. Storage is a place where no distinctions are made between things, a collective limbo, a place of surprises (Debo 2002) and revealment.

Daniel Robbins, the director of the Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design, described in the catalogue Warhol's departure in appropriating storage conditions for display:

*The first objects to which he was led was a cabinet of shoes, but no one expected he would order the whole cabinet for inclusion in his exhibition! We had never before looked at those shoes except as isolated pairs and as a collective problem to maintain. (Ditto for parasols, fabrics, and other accessories.) Warhol made a specification at this point: he requested that the catalogue entry for each item be as complete as possible. After the headaches of data assembly, we now understand why: each object is obliged to carry its full set of associations, and a weird poetry results; the combination of pedantry and sentiment that can be read in the entries is serial imagery of history. There are personal overtones of almost unbelievable poignancy in the now anonymous rubbed kid-heels of some fine lady's shoes.*

(Ostrow 1969, p. 14)



### 3.10-11

Shoe storage exhibit,  
*Raid the Icebox 1 with Andy Warhol*,  
 1969 Museum of Art Rhode Island  
 School of Design, Providence.

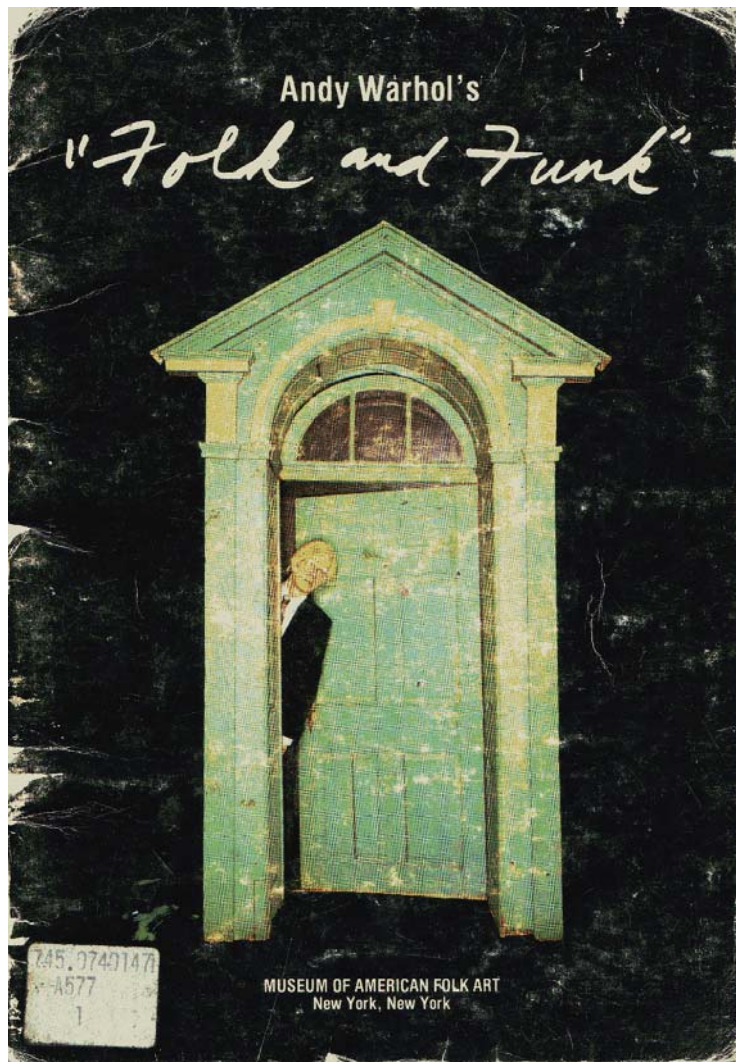
Warhol's collecting preferences expressed his desire to experience objects in unaltered states, to 'look as they are' (Brant & Cullman 1977, p. 13). The exhibition *Folk and funk*, curated from his personal folk art collection, revealed his eccentric liking for accumulating artefacts showing signs of use, misadventure or fabrication faults (Brant 1977). Warhol's curatorial events highlighted our relationships to things, the nature of use, personal preference and the dynamics of museum exchanges. Following a similar line to Warhol's curatorial and collecting intentions, I pursued the conveyance of fashion use and a sense of individual appropriation. Connections to wear are found in the conflicting fashion sites of either veneration or dereliction in the everyday associations of habitation.

Referencing an etymological study of 'wear', I recognise another set of relationships surrounding putting on clothes. This nuance relates to damage. Certainly worn-out or out-worn is a condition 'exhausted by use' (Oxford Dictionary of English 2005). Paradoxically, this neglected state portrays an extreme manifestation of wear, one oppositional to the ideal of fashion appearances. If studying the wear of garments looked at the activities of fashion, the worn-out condition suggested it's demise.

In creating this speculative discourse, therefore, I found it essential to reflect on the conditions of fashion itself, to address how degraded clothing states challenge the very nature of fashion, the design ideals related to time and place. Walter Benjamin and Giacomo Leopardi describe the essence of fashion through an understanding of fragile or momentary conditions of the ephemeral and rapid transformation.

For fashion was never anything other than the parody of the motley cadaver, provocation of death through the woman, and bitter colloquy with decay whispered between shrill bursts of mechanical laughter. That is fashion. And that is why she changes so quickly; she titillates death and is already something different, something new, as he casts about to crush her...

(Benjamin 2004, p. 63)



3.12

Cover from  
Brant, S & Cullman, E 1977,  
*Andy Warhol's 'Folk and funk'*,  
Museum of American Folk Art,  
New York

Benjamin's portrayal of transience referred to Leopardi's satirical nineteenth-century essay 'The dialogue between Fashion and Death' in *The moral essays* [Operette morali], 1832. The personification of Fashion and Death with their mother, Decay, a literary fiction about the fleetingness of existence, formed an important reference for my work in the National Trust exhibition. These sisters are united through their family trait of destruction and their innate ability to 'change the world' (Leopardi 1983, p. 51). This is a potent yet somewhat amusing relationship, where Fashion is destined to play forever with Death. In this regard, Fashion's constant attraction to present the 'new', 'the very latest' stylish offerings, relied upon inevitable demise: the speedy disfigurement of fashion's original appearance into a rotting corpse. Leopardi's parody suggested that a fashion exhibition about dilapidated old clothes is part of fashion's life cycle. The funeral of fashion portrays clothes out-of-date, worn out or no longer fit for use, and anticipated the emergence of the new. Transformational states express the evolution of fashion from the idea to creation through to experiences and circumstances of wear. Reviewing the formation of the new fashion museum, MoMu, in Antwerp, Kaat Debo questioned the fundamental dilemma of preserving an act of 'continuous consumption' (2002, p. 11) that the museum can only serve to provide an insight into the 'memory' of a garment. My exhibition proposal to the National Trust put forward the research idea of an 'unseen history' or 'alternate view' of fashion that intended to focus upon transience and a cyclical reading of wear.

Before the exhibition idea was resolved or a display site confirmed, I assembled together a curious set of fashion items. These were examples in unstable states, not necessarily 'new looking' or fitting into conventional exhibition standards of good condition. This selection method understood deterioration as a transformational state, not a maligned one, and associated 'worn' conditions with varied temporal and spatial circumstances. Works I noticed for study embodied strange manifestations, appearances affected by discolouration, deterioration, disfigurement and imperfection. Shifting states exemplified a type of fashion communication related to notions of use/wear and decay/worn.

Curating these obscure fashion states explored diverse meanings connected with appearance. Initially, I studied language, metaphoric meaning, living associations to economic and social conditions inferred by





### 3.13

Detail from Australia,  
*Boy's dress* c.1875,  
National Trust of Australia (Victoria) collection

### 3.14

Detail from Annie Doun, London,  
*Hat* c.1900,  
National Trust of Australia (Victoria) collection





### 3.15

Detail from Unknown, *Wrapper* 1800s,  
National Trust of Australia (Victoria) collection

deteriorating clothing forms, bringing together various critical observations about adverse states. Historically, less than pristine or atrophic looks in the fashion vernacular are linked to an unfavourable, careless demeanour or disreputable character. Derogatory phrases for an unsightly appearance include 'to be worse for wear', 'dressed in rags', or 'in tatters'. Traditionally, the term respectable is connected to dressing in a proper way. However, fashion's demise and clothing impressions caused by incessant use, aging or damage inspired twentieth-century anti-fashion movements like punk and grunge and drove historical referencing through proliferation of decay aesthetics and conceptual meaning in the 1990s (Evans 2003). Museum condition reports graded maligned states from fair to poor, which dictated exhibition exposure or storage oblivion. However, I discovered in studying fashion's metamorphosis that changing clothing forms hinted at things only partially understood. Fashion's demise as encountered through old clothes and maligned states put forward circumstances set outside the museum. In this respect the exhibition intended to communicate conditions seldom or rarely discovered on public display. In one section of *Clark's Spectres: when fashion turns back*, titled 'A new distress', the aesthetics of garments in poor condition are represented as signs of both trauma and wear and tear: an unconserved wedding dress lies on a large table in anticipation of museum preparation, surrounded by contemporary pieces of fashion (Clark 2005). Unlike Clark, I promote this 'new distress' as a continuance of fashion actions. I document wearing fashion and how fashion wears. In the exhibition *Fashion and fancy dress: the Messel family dress collection 1865–2005* at the Brighton Museum and Gallery, disintegrating garments too fragile to be placed on mannequins were displayed and the curators noted this quite unique encounter was 'an experience savoured by curator, conservator and private collector, but is all too often denied to the museum visitor' (de la Haye, Taylor & Thompson 2006, p. 12). For the National Trust exhibition I suggest a display trajectory based upon damage exposure rather than camouflage or concealment, an engagement with fashion's demise. The notion of curating 'an alternative view of fashion' exposes another reading of consumption and circulation. I therefore looked at the diversity of meaning implied by old and used clothes on many levels. Carlyle (1965) described clothing as an intricate part of the human condition. Fashion, through the progression of incremental and inevitable decay, is

charged with potent symbolism as a living association with human adversity.

Clothing is a common allegory for humanity drawn from characteristics associated with masquerade or camouflage and is used as to attribute deception, concealment, secrecy and layers of meaning (Hollander 1993). Old clothes are associated with dislocation and misery over an extensive range of cultural situations. Poetic inspiration is distilled from the clothing industry itself, drawn from the economic and social structures which include the circulation of new clothes to the second-hand clothing trade (Roche 1994). A collection of rags imparts a poignant imagery, documenting a trail running from luxury to 'abject misery' (Roche 1994, p. 367). The rag picker discussed by Benjamin (1997, p. 79) is a motif of the 'down trodden yet picturesque scavenger' collecting, selecting, recycling and reviving urban detritus. Marx employed the clothing metaphor in his commodity fetishism and hieroglyph of value theory, where the linen seller and the coat wearer illustrate the adverse relationship between product and production (Roche 1994). The critical connections to old clothes discussed by Palmer and Clark (2005) are poverty, disease and death. Inspired by Carlyle's discussions about the social life of clothes, and by thinking about these various associations, in proposing to curate 'old', 'used', 'worn' fashion clothes in the museum I sought to express a sense of wear in many forms. In the first exhibition I had explored the expressive gestures of dress to convey a sense of in wear/dressing relations. In the second exhibition I extended the transformational states of fashion from current/active use to studying dereliction as a state of demise and uselessness.

However, the challenge was how to suggest the wear of fashion in the selection and arrangement of the objects. Obviously, the content of the exhibition could not follow the standard generic classifications assigned for new, complete or exemplary museum works. I aimed to extend these generic readings to incorporate states of transformation proposed by the activities of use/wear or worn/decay. I began to experiment with a supplementary classification system that could possibly elicit another set of histories. In selecting, arranging and documenting the exhibition pieces I accentuated the diversity of appearance, detailing particular conditions and describing the sensibility of this transformation. I was concerned in the dissolution of an object's physical form through the actions of wear. Clothing in active disintegration can be read both

scientifically and poetically, and can also refer to the nature of the clothing's composition. Lou Taylor has argued a garment in a deteriorating state can reveal its inherent qualities: 'sometimes damage permits a useful view of a garment's construction' (2002, p. 20). I evolved the material object research through a framework noticing conspicuous degradation, forming classifications to initiate discussion and discourses about the study of wear. I sorted the degraded fashion into six states: tatters, stain, inside out and outside in, unfinished, relic and frippery.





3.16

Detail from Robertson & Moffat, Melbourne,  
*Ballgown bodice* c.1895,  
National Trust of Australia (Victoria) collection



## TATTERS

In 'tatters' I engaged with the fugitive construction of fashion. I referenced the transformation of an original appearance caused by acts of disintegration, where an ideal image turns into something else. Here, museum condition reports document the progress of devastation and vulnerability, describing shattered, degraded, brittle or disfigured materials. In tatters, I released the aesthetic of the most worn-out surfaces. These were fashionable items showing the poetics of disintegration and the beauty found in the transience of things. Derelict states I curated in relationship to dressing practices and the affective response to particular appearances of the worn-out or the well worn. This understanding of wear is similar to the Japanese sensibility of *wabi* and *sabi* (Crowley 2001) and I found an appreciation for the aesthetics of natural transience in the surface of old and used clothes.

## STAIN

'Stain' is the category where I reviewed both the ideal image of fashion and the customary museum representation. Mary Douglas (1980) argues the stain has invoked the most extreme cultural standards relating not only to hygiene, but purity, morality and social order. A stain is provocative in the way it disturbs or mars a surface. Fashion's dark secret is the continual struggle with, and demand for, an ideal image: looking good, maintaining the best condition through cleaning and storage. When Carlyle proclaimed in *Sartor resartus*: 'Aprons are Defences: against injury to cleanliness, to safety, to modesty and sometimes to roguery' (1965, p. 31) he alluded to the outside forces fashion contends with. In the museum stains are usually hidden, camouflaged or eradicated. Ann Jones and Peter Stallybrass (2000) suggest stains are mnemonic markers haunting device, which signify the living even though they are long departed. I found the inclusion of stained garments a bold gesture in the research, connecting the collection to the wearer's presence and circumstances effective outside the museum.

## INSIDE-OUT

Here, I looked at exposing the spatial quality of clothing and I devised ways to explore the dimension of the garment, delving into both exterior and interior surfaces.

The category 'inside out and outside in' invaded the familiar dressing spaces known only to the wearer. The viewing of both the interior and underwear workings helped expose dressing structure and ritual. This revealed the complexity of how a shape has been formed, why a material falls in a particular way and how fashion wears. I planned to convey a more modest aesthetic rendered through humble materials drained by wear and washing.

## UNFINISHED

The discovery of incomplete or dismantled garments formulated my fourth category, 'unfinished'. The extraordinary language of creating clothing, making and putting a garment together is viewed in these separated or unresolved pieces. My interest lay in the deconstruction of fashion in thinking about how clothes come together and fall apart.

## RELIC

My last two categories described fashion fragments from the important 'relic' to the frivolous 'frippery'. These genres represented the smallest remains from shreds to parts of complex fashion ensembles. Here, I tested the hierarchy of value assigned to certain pieces regardless of their condition or scale. Fashion memorials, or relics, can be prized for a relationship to a particular person, event or time. Curiosities often co-exist with their original documentation and information gathered from their previous owners, a combination of fact, hearsay and guesswork. From encounters with disfigurement or intimacy I studied degrees of significance assigned to the smallest dressing elements.



### 3.17

Detail from Australia,  
*Bodice from a boy's dress*  
c.1868, National Trust of Australia  
(Victoria) collection



### 3.18

Detail from Australia,  
*Bodice*  
c.1975, National Trust of Australia  
(Victoria) collection

### 3.19 (Right)

*Ribbon from*  
*Queen Victoria's Wedding dress 1840*  
*Noble rot 2006,*  
photographer Ming Tee

A piece of the ribbons  
made specially for Queen  
Victorias wedding dress.

Piece of  
made specially  
Queen's wedding  
dress.





**3.20**

France, *Man's waistcoat*  
eighteenth century, first floor,  
red bedroom, marquetry table  
*Noble rot* 2006



**3.21**

Detail Robertson & Moffat, Melbourne

*Petticoat from Wedding dress c.1885*

National Trust of Australia

(Victoria) collection





### 3.22-24

City Watch house,  
exercise yard, cell and graffiti,  
Old Melbourne Goal 2005

## FRIPPERY

In contrast to the distinguished fragment is the forgotten or misplaced fashion item. named this category 'frippery' to express the non-essential elements, the trivial or sometimes ostentatious finery that completes the dress composition. These nomadic elements like ribbons, lace and artificial flowers are removed and recycled from one garment to the next. I assembled both the trimmings and the scarred garment surfaces that disclose their absence to represent the continual resurrection of fashion.

Ada Cambridge recalled the passion evoked by the removal of a lace heirloom:

'And saw Miss Balcombe burning the Venetian lace?'

'Yes. She was standing over the fireplace, with a candle in one hand and lace in the other. She was holding it over the flame, and it was flaring and fizzling up, very nearly all burnt. I could she had just taken it off, because otherwise she was fully dressed as when she left the drawing room; the blue bodice was plain and bare, and the silk was torn where the lace had been stitched on, and wrenched off anyhow.'

(Cambridge 2004, p. 39)

The classifications were developed to initiate an exhibition dialogue about fashion through the perspective of wear. In the final installation the categories were mingled together, but their existence served to engage the representation of fashion with a series of varied permutations and manifestations. I believe this was a confrontational representation, because it contradicted the ideal fashion appearance, which sustains the 'new' look, longevity of material assets and the custodial responsibilities of the museum. In this exploration of conditions I produced 'new' associations for dilapidated appearances connected to the vestiges or fragments of fashion. Garments breaking down signify 'outworn' or 'worn out' condition. I found the representation of 'outworn' extended the original state of wear into an abject and picturesque encounter. Here, my intention was to highlight the transformative and disfigured form in a state no longer deemed usable for dress or





### 3.25

Como House and Garden  
c.2008 photograph courtesy of the  
National Trust of Australia (Victoria)

### 3.26-27

Como garden 2009

suitable for exhibition.

In proposing this new understanding and exposure of wear I titled the exhibition *Noble rot: An alternate view of fashion*. I sought to establish a positive engagement with fashion's divergent states by alliance with the benevolent grape fungus. In addition to this association, the dichotomy between the meanings of the two words 'noble' and 'rot' established the differences provoked by an impressive appearance to a degenerate one. The title therefore reinforced the ambiguity implied by fashion and decay, and introduced the community to the diverse perspectives offered in the exhibition. Indeed, the speculative nature of the exhibition addressed the extreme permutations of fashion represented by conditions of wear. In these excursions I was testing fashion's generic exhibition forms. Although from the start my intention in the exhibition was certainly not to advocate suspension of customary material conservation or custodial ethics of the museum, I desired to extend the fashion experience of clothing by experimentation with varied conditions. In keeping with the exhibition premise the room guide published the following disclaimer: 'Visitors to the exhibition are asked to experience the aesthetics of the ephemeral, to find their idea of impermanence, and be aware that the Trust continues to care and protect its collection' (Healy 2006b n.p.).

## DRESSING/UNDRESSING THE HOUSE

While moving the *Noble rot* collection from the protected atmosphere of a storage box to the spectacle of public display I thought about the experience of shifting appearances of museum conditions: how an object is prepared for display, how the nature of the exhibition space regularises the object's appearance and how the arrangement is read. I understood the items gathered for *Noble rot* were fragile, fragmented and vulnerable but I was keen to present them undisturbed. In extending the parameters of museum thinking I reflected upon Susan Crane's comments about the museum: 'Externalizing the mental function of remembering, museums of history, natural history, and culture select some memories to retain in the perpetual present. Preserved and conserved objects are organized in a meaningful narrative that is offered continuously and accessibly' (Crane 2006, p. 102). In an exhibition about the wear of fashion, I provoked the museum quality of timelessness and the way items are spatially known. In selecting a venue for *Noble rot*, therefore, I looked for an environment that could present a diverse set of appearances in an unobtrusive manner. Originally, the National Trust manager suggested the City Watch House at the Old Melbourne Gaol as a venue to stage the exhibition. This is an oppressive and frightening environment, an incarceration facility that operated from 1913 to 1994. The building comprises a series of rooms designed for waiting, isolation and restraint. It is an environment of control and confinement, and random traces of graffiti in the interiors are a rare and poignant record of previous occupants. The Trust imagined the exhibition staged inside a sequence of holding cells. However, I found the City Watch House did not suggest my sense of disorder for *Noble rot*, which is an organic lively one portraying the breakdown of matter not spirit. The City Watch House site is charged with a particular set confronting circumstances that I preferred not to entertain. It is not just an empty gallery space to fill. Instead of using the City Watch House I decided to revisit the traditional venue of the National Trust exemplified in the historic house museum. My tactic was to engage with the relationships created between fashion actions and dwelling, exploring the notion of social space. I suggested a local site encompassing a house and garden. I supported returning to the National Trust property, Como Historic House and Garden, where I could

develop further the exhibition model initiated by the *Fabulous* exhibition when the house was transformed into a distinctive fashion environment. I found the situation of a house museum stimulated the exploration of experiencing a dressing–wear dialogue in association with a domestic environment.

Como House and Garden is a popular Australian heritage attraction managed by the National Trust. The heritage register of the State of Victoria describes the key features of the site:

Built on land purchased in the first land sales held south of the Yarra, the house and outbuildings have been subject to few alterations since the 1870s extensions. Although the estate has been greatly reduced from its original 54.5 acres, the general garden layout and vistas from and around the house have changed little since the 19th century. The maintenance of the house's integrity was facilitated by the fact that it was owned by the same family, the Armytage family from 1864 to 1959, when it was donated to the National Trust ... Como House is of architectural significance as perhaps Victoria's most intact and complete example of a 19th century estate mansion. The house is a most unusual combination of the Australian Regency style with details normally used on Italianate buildings later in the century. These include the verandahs with cast iron balustrading and the parapeted tower at the rear. (Victorian Heritage Database 2007, Como house)

In 1959 Como became the first historic house in Australia acquired by the National Trust with all its contents largely intact. The Burra charter lays down the protocols for protecting the cultural significance and fabric of the site, which covers the building infrastructure, household fit-out and all original surfaces from unnecessary interference. Curated as a family home with many in-situ placements, Como revolves around the representation of the occupation by the Armytage family, set in the period of the 1920s and 1930s.

Como is an extensive property. Construction of the house started in 1847, with major extensions added





### 3.28-29

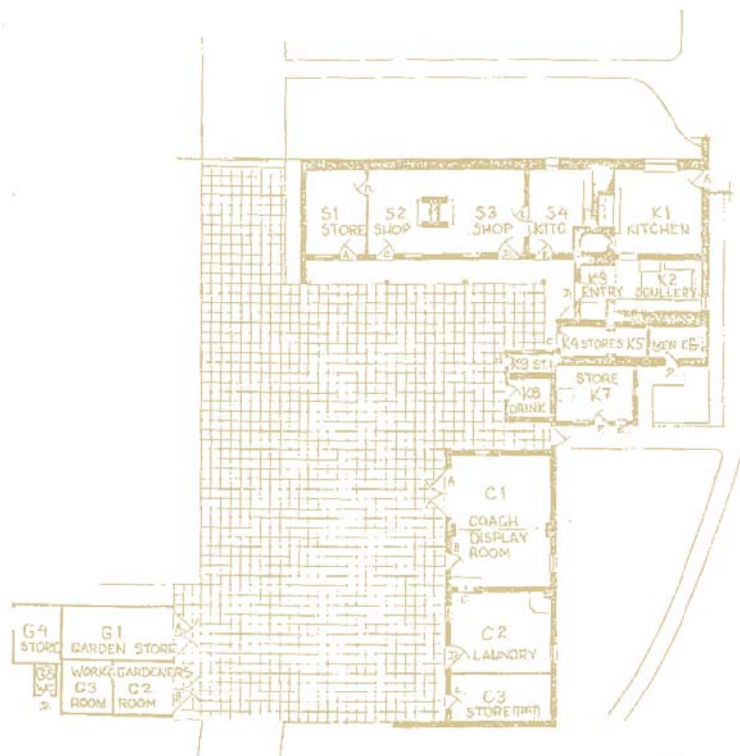
Como House and Garden 1958,  
 photograph by Colin Caldwell,  
 State Library of Victoria



### 3.30-31

Como House and Garden 1958,  
 photograph by Colin Caldwell,  
 State Library of Victoria





**3.32** (right)

Como house floor plan  
outbuildings 2005

**3.33** (previous page)

Como house floor plan  
ground floor 2005

**3.34** (left)

Como house floor plan  
first floor 2005

in the 1870s (Struthers 1996). The principal building has a ballroom wing and tower, upstairs and downstairs areas and a mixture of outbuildings. The building's guide records how the household functioned and indicates rooms designated for particular activities. Marked out are the public and private domains. There are out-of-bounds areas like administrative rooms, storerooms and sections too fragile for people traffic, including a butler's stairwell and tower. The guide orientates the domestic passages through the property, which would become a counterpoint for invention of an alternative course following the progress of detritus. Installed in the house are over fifteen hundred pieces of furniture and decorative arts, predominately sourced from the Armytage family. However, throughout the year discrete interior changeovers happen. Select rooms are reconfigured while other sections remain unchanged. I noticed the house is curated with regular installations directed by seasonal change and special events in a routine known as 'dressing the house', which involves placement of key objects that subtly transform the sense of the room. Mnemonic devices, like clothing laid out on a bed, an open book or a displaced toy recall how family members once inhabited the house. Dressing the house is an activity which communicates the nuances of fashion. These dressing acts simultaneously engage with both the social space of clothing and the house, imaginings of various material gestures and disturbances caused by everyday events. The immersion of the community into a private domestic world is an approach widespread in historic houses and 'folk' museums. However, Mark Sandberg (2003) argues the engagement with the domestic situation sometimes establishes an unsettling dynamic, where the perception by the community is one of an intruder rather than the experience of an insider. The premise of intrusion or trespass is an intriguing phenomenon. I explored possibilities for engaging with these intimate boundaries in the *Noble rot* installations by playing with the defined house zones and the restricted areas.

*Noble rot* was set within surroundings of exhibited artefacts. The protective overlay constrained any curatorial thoughts about extreme manipulation of these spaces. This became a potent catalyst in producing more subtle responses and engaging with the house conditions to develop the installation. National Trust curators Elizabeth Anya-Petrivna and Katie Symons introduced the workings of the house to the project. They shared the didactics of the room layouts, selection of furniture and various histories, which take in



### 3.35

Household keys for  
Como House



regular haunting by the Armytage family ghosts Carolyn, Ethel and Freddie. From these recurring images of past inhabitants and living customs I formed associations to the return of past fashions. I continued the ghostliness of the house and reinhabited the property through unexpected sightings of the *Noble rot* installation. Throughout these early excursions I was drawn by a large bundle of household keys, which unlock the numerous pathways that provide entry into various concealed zones and follow the domestic routine of the house. There are stairways originally accessed by servants that lead to the tower or the back of house, and storage furniture filled with household stuff. This pattern for traversing, revealing and concealing was an important element in thinking about how *Noble rot* 'remains' were to be encountered. I proposed to disrupt the routine by identifying specific zones within the house where dynamic contrasts between clothing states and the domestic interiors could be created. I intended to transform the traditional concept for dressing a period room frozen in time with the natural flux of decay. I drew on Benjamin's comments in the *Arcades project* – 'But the rags, the refuse – these I will not describe but put on display' (2004, p. 860) – to consider how *Noble rot* materials should be discovered. Although I followed a similar display encounter to that established in *The blue dress* exhibition, the materials displayed undressed or partially dressed in this exhibition were disfigured and unstable. Following the premise of dressing/wear familiarity, fashion items were exposed in varied surfaces, details and actions. However, I used the house environs to both support and integrate these fragile materials. I experimented with the house environment of excessive detail and extraordinary scale and tested invasive tactics for *Noble rot* in a series of mock-up installations. I looked at creating circumstances for objects to form part of the house in states of either blending in or standing out. Here, I explored ways to engage with the household vistas and navigate the excessive house surfaces. Issues of community access and inviting intimate perspectives to the *Noble rot* experience were key to the design. This produced an alternative view of fashion history, creating transient encounters in unexpected and sometimes disturbing manifestations.

A diverse fashion condition was articulated in a series of in-situ installations where *Noble rot* permeated the domestic surrounds, I appropriated the dressing routine in order to imagine clothing reinhabiting

the house and the house reinhabiting the clothing. I integrated the exhibition artefacts into the heritage fabric, merging or seemingly disappearing into the detail of interior surfaces. The strategy fragmented the installation path with only odd areas of the house and garden consumed by the installation. Diverse dressing viewpoints were set up and connections established between varied constructed environments. Although period homes commonly apply house dressing to produce a sense of habitation, *Noble rot* was an invasive occupation; it introduced fanciful situations that are not dressed re-enactments of past occupants. In place of the standard narrative, I resurrected garments in their authentic states, to divulge the inevitable cyclical nature of the ephemeral and capture the vulnerability of material things. The *Noble rot* encounter posed a fashion narrative by material abstraction of surface and surrounds. I responded to each room's function and designated title to inspire the *Noble rot* ramblings. Consequently, original relationships assigned to each room inspired an abstracted dressing configuration. For instance, Freddy's room is an upstairs bedroom allegedly haunted by its namesake. It was selected for habitation by mourning clothes and mortuary guides. The upstairs bathroom, acclaimed in the early twentieth century for its sophisticated plumbing, displayed clothing soiled and stained.

In inserting *Noble rot* into Como House and Garden I made overt references to similarities between fashion and architecture. A sense of residency evolved in dressing the house. I noticed pertinent relationships between the dwelling and the dwellers. Quinn (2003) argued elements of human scale, mass and space are comparable in both fashion and architectural practices. The associations drawn between the body, fashion and architecture introduce curious questions about conditions of occupation and abandonment, dereliction and conservation, the transitory and the static. In *Noble rot* I suggested the experience of wear encountered through understandings of clothing residence via physical conditions of temporal and spatial flux. Clothing's embodiment is applied in an architectural metaphor, describing itself as a human habitat, dwelling and shelter (Carlyle 1948; Quinn 2003). Clothing as a residence is a social space. Therefore my attention to dressing/wear is immersed in the domestic environment of habitation. My engagement with spatiality, the dynamics proposed between architecture and fashion, both visually and theoretically, anticipated a broader



**3.36**

Chest-of-drawers  
in Laura's bedroom 2005

**3.37**

Built-in-wardrobe  
Susan Brown's bedroom 2005



**3.38**

Mock-up petticoat installation,  
first floor on Tower stairwell 2005



**3.39-40**

Mock-up petticoat installation,  
first floor on Tower stairwell 2005



**3.41**

Mock-up petticoat installation,  
ground floor on the butler's stairwell 2005



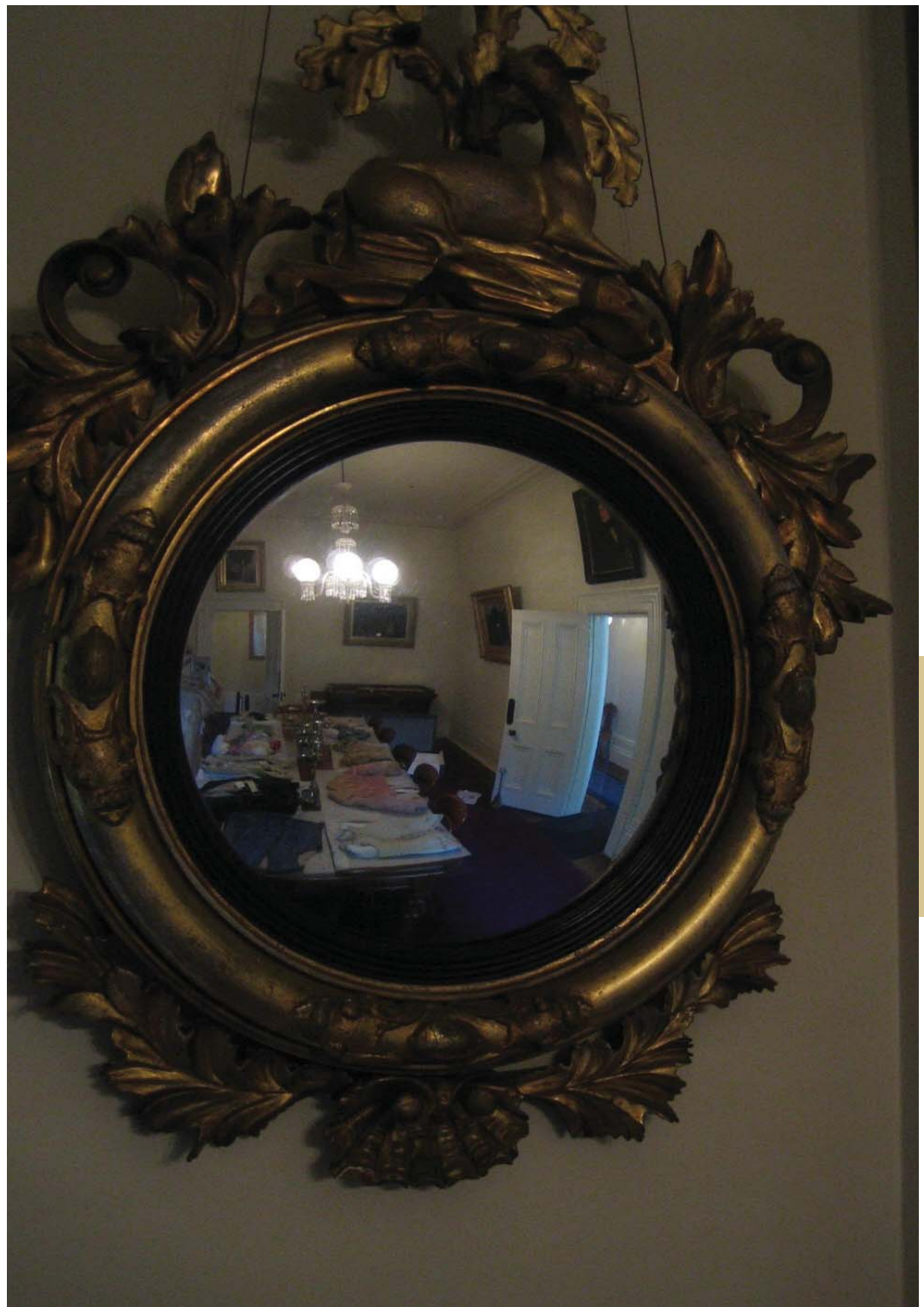


**3.42**

Mock-up bodice installation,  
ground floor dining  
room table 2005.

**3.43**

Mock-up bodice installation,  
ground floor dining room table,  
view in butler's mirror 2005.





**3.46**

First floor bathroom,  
collection of discoloured clothes

*Noble rot* 2006,  
photographer Ming Tee





**3.47**

Unknown,  
*Crinoline* 1850s,  
*Noble rot* 2006.

examination of worn constructions.

Quinn described the elusive perspective common in both architecture and fashion structures which, 'creates spaces that are denied from sight, generated fantasies of inclusion and exclusion' (2003, p. 64). *Noble rot* heightened these display perspectives by experimenting with interactions between surroundings and the shifting clothing forms. In this way the community sighted clothing states and sections of the house rarely exposed. The exhibition *Skin & bones*, curated by Brooke Hodge, drew parallels between the language of fashion and architecture (2007). In *Noble rot* I noticed the construction of space and the erosion of surfaces facilitated the reading of exhibits in ways which encourage transdisciplinary parallels and created allegiances of inhabitation and embodiment of space.

Exploring ways to converse between the architecture/the house and the Noble rot trail, I heightened the sensibility of wear by using intimate viewpoints to create striking differences between scale and proximity. Working outside the confines of a dedicated gallery space, I directed my focus to the habitual routines of the house, taking advantage of the various viewpoints and installation appearances this offered. I followed these well-worn trails to re-inhabit the house with clothing forms. Certain installation perspectives expanded the way clothing was exposed, like viewing the inside of a garment. Nineteenth-century constructions were aligned in, for example, the butler's pantry installation where a crinoline was suspended above the servant's staircase. Staircases were used across the installation to reveal intimate viewpoints or sightings of the garment form. The opened doorway of the Como tower invited the community to gaze at petticoats mounted on the stairs. A quote attached to the doorway alluded to the nature of these sightings:

The sad thoughts with which this incident naturally left me were at length and suddenly dispersed, as sad thoughts not infrequently are, by a petticoat. When I say petticoat, I use the word in its literal sense, not colloquially as a metaphor for its usual wearer, meaning thereby a dainty feminine undergarment seen only by men on rainy days, and one might add washing-days. It was indeed to the fortunate accident of its being washing-day at the pretty cottage near which in the course of my

morning wanderings I had set me down to rest, that I owed the sight of the petticoat in question.

Richard Le Gallienne, *The quest of the golden girl; a romance*, London, 1896.

In these circumstances I created occasions to encounter frequently restricted or hidden spaces in both garment and building forms.

## INTERIORS

*Noble rot* engaged with a sense of domesticity. An exhibited interior is a situation to make relationships between function and form, design idea or social engagement. The 2004 exhibition *Dangerous liaisons: fashion and furniture in the eighteenth century*, curated by Harold Koda and Andrew Bolton in the French period rooms of New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art, connected dress and furniture to the social conduct of eighteenth-century aristocracy. The exhibition poised costumed figures in flirtatious dressing gestures, clothing juxtaposed with furniture elements to convey a historical rendition of erotic play. Mimi Hellman's essay in the exhibition catalogue suggests 'the intimacies of the interior played out not only between people but also between people and the furniture that surrounded them. Objects such as chairs and tables were active protagonists in an elaborate game of cultivated sociability' (Bolton, Koda & Hellman 2006, p. 15). *Dangerous liaisons* created a dialogue between function and the pursuit of pleasurable activities. Peter McNeil argues this relationship between the body and the dress placed in a tableau format relies on engagement with the community through 'balletic gesture' while the detail of the garments is neglected, making the material artefacts less visible for viewing in the recreation of dressed moments (2009, p. 158). *Noble rot* integrated within the interiors to produce a sense of residency by the clothing. As the clothing was displayed mainly in a disembodied state, it read like furnishings, but the proximity of the clothing contrived in these settings created an intense viewing experience.

Unlike *Dangerous liaisons*, *Noble rot* was an encounter with fashion's abandoned clothing forms. These fragile states set in the domestic space created a humble, unobtrusive convergence. I appropriated the



furnishings to make connections and associations to wear relating to worn surfaces and the spaces of fashion. I took over the wardrobe – an everyday repository for fashion accumulation – as a display site. This familiar undressed space is where ‘cast off’ clothes are selected, stored and maintained by the wearer. Here, the wardrobe’s role was extended from repository to one of acute observation. Displaying garments back into these intimate vessels allowed for curious sightings, delicate revealing, through acts of peering or catching a glimpse. The wardrobe opens up an expansive space similar to the Narnia model, a conduit to somewhere else. Gaston Bachelard expresses this fantastical dimension, a type of sartorial invitation when he writes ‘Does there exist a single dreamer of words who does not respond to the word wardrobe?’ (1994, p. 78) The imagined wardrobe space is speculative and unknown. In the Como household the wardrobe was already inhabited, storing the collection; it concealed the clothing hordes and textile stuffs once worn by the household. Storage and care of clothing was an inherent part of the original household activities. The wardrobe is a piece of furniture which recalls most vividly the everyday fashion events of putting clothing away, the ritual of maintenance and appearance. The *Noble rot* exhibits supplemented the original Armytage clothing and accessories left over in the storage vessels. Installation of additional items, dilapidated or in disrepair, made reference to continual processes of decay where containment and maintenance is futile. In these infiltrations the wardrobe was revealed inhabited by the presence of others. The wardrobe is a space of order and disorder, discovery and concealment. Stallybrass observes the haunted nature of the storage space where ‘the wardrobe re-creates the ghostly presence of the dresses that are no longer there. There is, indeed, a close connection between the magic of lost clothes and the fact that ghosts often step out of closets and wardrobes to appal us, haunt us, perhaps even console us’ (1993, p. 41).

Although the wardrobe is an expected site to find clothing, it is a repository that also suggests loss and neglect. An area rarely shared for public view, looking inside one is an inquisitive yet irreverent gesture. The gloominess of the wardrobe’s interior creates an ambiguous display setting, where the contents remain partly hidden or underexposed. Wardrobes in several of Como’s bedrooms were available for viewing; sometimes the door was removed or held back. Wardrobes hold collections, they are not a space for singling



**3.48**

Robertson & Moffat, Melbourne,  
*Petticoats from Wedding dress*  
c.1885, *Noble rot* 2006.



### 3.50

The withdrawing room: a helpful valet,  
room from the Hôtel de Varengeville,  
Paris c.1736-52,  
*Dangerous Liaisons: Fashion and  
furniture in the eighteenth century*  
published in Koda,  
Bolton & Hellman (2006) p. 62

### 3.49

The broken vase: a consoling merchant  
in the Sèvres room c.1770,  
*Dangerous Liaisons: Fashion and  
furniture in the eighteenth century*  
published in Koda,  
Bolton & Hellman (2006) p. 95

out. The experience of the wardrobe centres upon the collective massing of clothes. The appropriation of the wardrobe into the display scheme portrayed the ephemeral nature of fashion through conditions of consumption and obsolescence.

The table was appropriated as another *Noble rot* observation device. Originally used to keep objects off the floor, the table's flat surface orientates objects horizontally and facilitates a view across or down into a garment's void. The showing of garments on a table surface is a fully exposed yet intimate encounter. Tables are also social agents for assembling a company of people. I sought various tables throughout the household to display various routines of the house from eating or sewing to overt display. I was interested in the ideas of communication formed by the household chattels. Barthes had grouped together the areas of fashion and food as objects of good communication (Sheringham 2006), so in thinking about the social spaces of fashion I was drawn to the conviviality and exchange surrounding the routines of the dinner table. In the Westfield mall exhibition the Trust display had already appropriated the dining table as a device of presence. In *Noble rot*, however, clothing took possession of Como's dining-room table to suggest the consumption and communication of fashion.

In a house, the dining room table is a social hub, a communal site for eating, entertainment and dressing up. Formal schemes for arrangement of table decorations, food dishes and seating were followed to devise a clothing plan. Mrs Beeton's nineteenth-century book of household management advises 'the pleasure of a dinner party will depend on the arrangement of the guests at the table, so as to form a due admixture of talkers and listeners, the grave and gay' (2000, p. 21). In response, I took remnants of once-grand garments and took over the individual diner's place settings. Male and female, adult and child were assembled together. Separated parts of fashionable ensembles were laid out, bodices without skirts, waistcoats without trousers, to represent the partial glimpses of the dressed at the table. Garment pieces followed a formal seating arrangement, reflected in the butler's mirror. Glimpses of either the back or front, interior or exterior, were guided by positioning in the room. Clothing pieces, flayed open, were ready for consumption and delectation like culinary fare. The optical devices and dining room etiquette produced an intimate environment where





**3.51**

First floor the red bedroom,  
open wardrobe, 2005

the disfigured and disembodied garments could be closely scrutinised, yet formed a complementary alliance with the room's function and furnishings. The feast of bodices and waistcoats showed an absence of the completely dressed form. The physical fragmentation was an abstract notion about the social space of fashion, showing dressing/wear relationships supposed by the dining room setting. In contrast to the shiny patina and social connections of the dining-room table was another prop in the installation: the worktable used by Como's resident seamstress. This piece of furniture, with pitted surface and blackened iron burn, bears the scars accumulated from production of the household's clothes.

Chairs were obvious places of residence. Clothes seated on chairs were designed to show abandonment in undressing activities yet sometimes I noticed these garments seemed occupied. I took slip-covers off chairs to strip them back to their original surfaces and blend in with the worn-down patinas of the installation.

The bathroom is unlike other areas of the house. Here, I made associations with cleaning and the continual pressure of reviving materials to remain new looking. I aligned soiled garments to deterrents and revival devices for protecting clothes from vermin and use. In my focus upon less-than-pristine states I uncovered an enormous body of literature relating to maintenance. There is a pattern of activities that extend beyond the wearing of clothes, rituals of taking out, putting away and revival. The continual reference to stale clothes, the need for airing, revival and restoration alludes to acts that prolong the appearance of the dressed state.

The wear of fashion enters into the processes used to prolong the 'life' of a garment. In her study of haute couture designs in Canada, Alexander Palmer mentioned extensive traces of wear and modifications in the Royal Ontario Museum collection of haute couture gowns. She writes:

As I looked at garments that repeatedly revealed evidence of wear-worn hemlines in ballgowns, shortened hemlines, and numerous alterations and careful mends ... I found myself with many unanswered questions. These traces of wear and modification do not support the commonly held assumption that haute couture clothing was treated as a disposable commodity, to be quickly replaced





**3.52**

Ground floor dining room,  
Bodices and waistcoats on the dining table,  
*Noble rot* 2006



### 3.53

England, *Apron* c.1720  
on silver tray on sideboard,  
*Noble rot* 2006,  
photographer Ming Tee

### 3.54

First floor nurses room, Australia,  
*Seamstress table* c.1920 detail,  
*Noble rot* 2006,  
photographer Ming Tee

### 3.55

First floor nurses room, Australia,  
*Riding jacket* c.1815  
*Noble rot* 2006,  
photographer Ming Tee



**3.56**

Detail from Australia,  
*Boy's dress* c.1875,  
National Trust of Australia (Victoria)





**3.57**

Ground floor breakfast room,

Unknown

*Wedding dress 1875*

*Noble rot 2006,*

photographer Ming Tee.

by another example in the latest style. The evidence left in the designs clearly demonstrates that the idea of conspicuous consumption in this context is flawed and limiting. The clothes I examined also do not corroborate public opinion that museum collections hold only pristine 'museum quality' couture dresses. The dresses themselves indicate that many of the designs had a complex use.

(Palmer 2001, pp. 4–5)

The reading of fashion described in Palmer's study records dressing traces. However, the documentation/ experience of these acts or reference to these idiosyncratic features is lessened in the display arena. The various clothing items gathered for *Noble rot* featured complexities of wear as I intentionally hunted out items with revival features, like a patch or a darn, or refashioning processes.

Surprisingly, when the Australian weaver Liz Williamson was researching darning examples represented in Australian public collections, she discovered the domestic remedial technique was rarely documented. Although an altered condition, this practice makes an item look 'as new' again so there is no reason to record it. The challenge for Williamson in studying darning was accessing such items, which are seldom collected in this state or the detail recorded (Williamson 2004).

## TEXT

For the textual layer of *Noble rot*, I used writing about wear to trigger responses to altered or disturbed conditions. I started with the museum label. This followed the standard sequence of information advised by the National Trust curators but also included some additional material. Initially, I was tempted to display the National Trust collection without labels. In the inaugural display at MoMu fashion museum in Antwerp, the visitor experienced the collection without intrusion from didactics (Debo 2002). In entertaining the premise of an alternative history of fashion I speculated about how this parallel practice might be captured with or without authoritative identifying data. In curating the *Noble rot* installation I wanted to reveal the curious elements often affixed to a work: the handwritten tags, the carefully annotated histories transcribed by many

hands. When I was looking at the Trust collection in the early stages of the research I was particularly taken by the handwritten letters found in the recesses of garments and, in the case of Mrs Curwen-Walker's bodice, rolled-up in the sleeve. The note read:

This little bodice was probably worn in the eighteen forties or fifties. She had 13 children so probably lost her slim figure, but stayed short. Her father had some trade with India and was interested in sealing and whaling. They came to Melbourne.

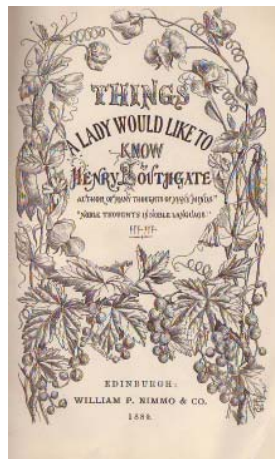
(Healy 2006b, n.p.)

These odd statements are rich associations for representing the nature of the collection and dressing/wear practices. Rather than keeping these elements hidden I included the various personal styles, bringing varied connotations about object documentation and experience into the installation.

Additionally, I experimented with producing another response to the works by including condition details contained within the standard museum label format. In preparing copy for Lady Martin's bodice, I recorded 'sweat pads' and yellowed and shattered conditions. Stockings were listed with conditions of soiled and mended. Other exhibits were revealed after the medium entry with descriptive states of crushed, shattered, discoloured, burned, altered, stained, gouged, patched, or moth eaten. In accentuating altered and uncontrolled states of fashionable dress I gave expression to signs of wear. By attracting attention to these idiosyncratic markers showing the impact of everyday circumstances of use and age, I alluded to the mundane realities of dressing. I intended my curatorial provocation to mischievously upset the idea of the exhibition state by making no suggestions about conservation actions in this exposure. This was an unprecedented act for a public exhibition.

Working alongside the label information was another thread of text. National Trust curator Anya-Petrivna compiled a curious selection of nineteenth- and twentieth-century advice books about fashion etiquette and clothing care. These references presented the difficulties and challenges associated with being fashionable and described dilemmas affecting the wardrobe's upkeep. When viewed in the context of a nineteenth-century





### 3.58 (left)

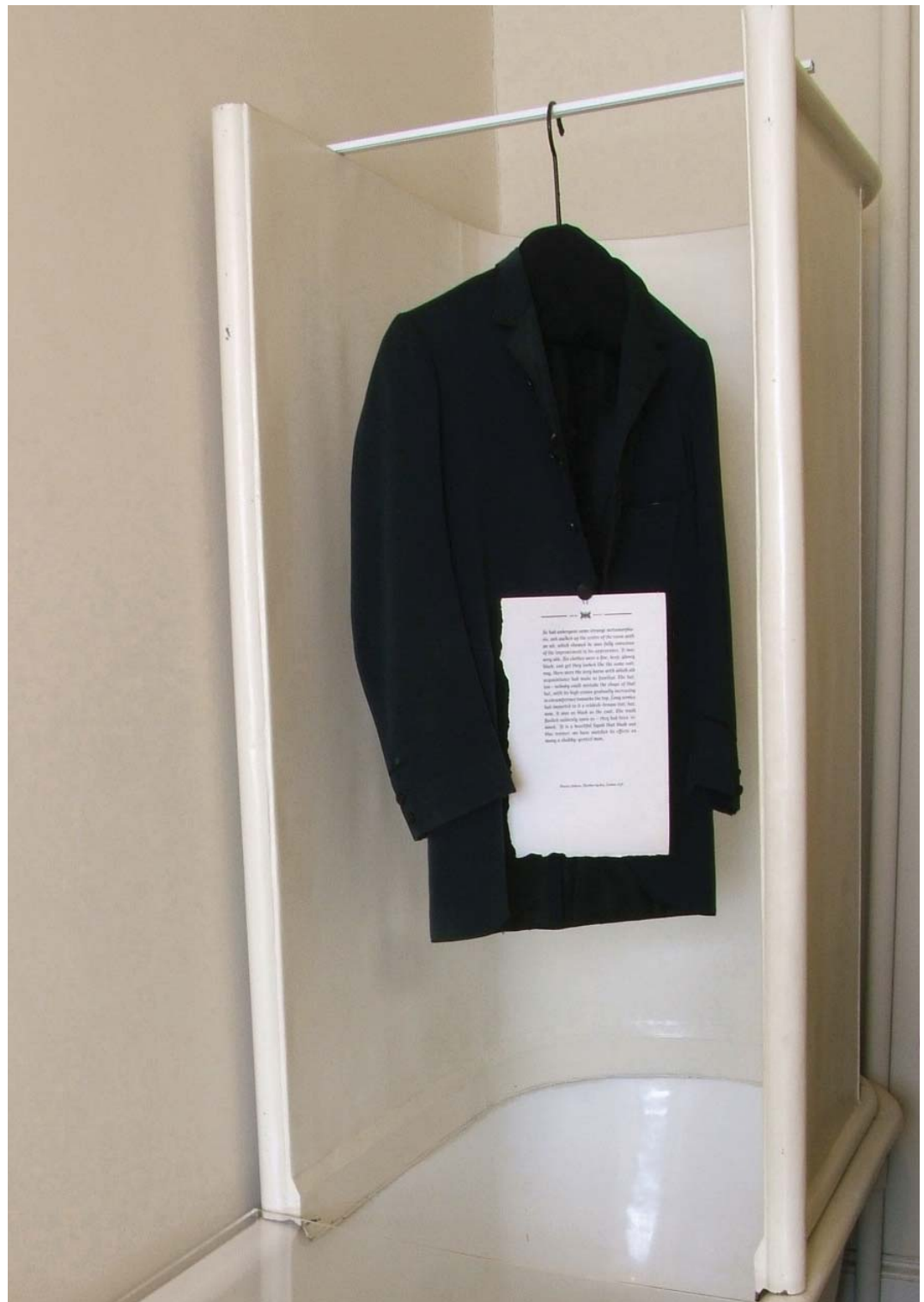
Ground floor, Study,  
*The Universal Instructor and  
 Manual of General Reference*,  
 Melbourne 1882,  
 private collection.

### 3.59 (right)

Henry Southgate,  
*Things a Lady would like to Know*,  
 1876, private collection.

### 3.60

First floor, Bathroom,  
England,  
*Frockcoat jacket* c.1895  
*Noble rot* 2006,  
photographer Ming Tee.



household, the dilapidated wardrobe *Noble rot* presented implied the possibilities of social disgrace and these manuals offered sage advice about how to maintain, revive and aspire to restore these clothes back to ideal fashion appearances. Books and literary quotes were inconspicuously dispersed amongst the furnishings in the installation. This subtext elaborated routines of care and maintenance concerned with keeping up appearances. While objects on display conveyed maligned states, possible remedial actions were juxtaposed in situ, establishing a historic thread about dressing practices and wearer responsibility. The selection of household manuals and guides included Henry Southgate, *Things a lady would like to know* 1876, Mrs Julia McNairWright, *The complete home: an encyclopedia of domestic life and affairs* 1879, *The Australian household guide* 1916, edited by Lady Hackett and *The universal instructor and manual of general reference*, Melbourne, 1882. These books outlined dressing rituals, social etiquette and strange concoctions devised for clothing restoration; they documented both dressing hardships and pleasures. Anya-Petrivna argued in label copy for the installation that ‘the household manual tried to anticipate the answers to domestic questions its readers might wish to hear. Many of these texts called themselves “Oracles” meaning profoundly wise.’ I saw these texts as key to unravelling the mundanity of fashion. Their methods for revitalisation extended a use, prolonging the experience of wear and the circulation of fashion. For instance, in the upstairs bathroom a once black nineteenth-century frockcoat, now coloured deep green, was juxtaposed beside text from Charles Dickens’s *Sketches of Boz* 1832 describing the cosmetic treatment known as black reviver. Beside the suspended crinoline installation was advice for reviving a limp petticoat.

## CURATING WASTE PRODUCTS

Recycling worn-out clothes is another remedial action, eradicating the worn through processes of renewal. I included in the exhibition the progressive economics publication *Waste products and undeveloped substances* 1862 and 1873 by Peter Simmonds, a manual of sustainable solutions for the increasing quantity of obsolete or worn-out commodities produced during the industrial revolution. Simmonds sought to redefine and reinvigorate the meanings associated with used commodities. In his study he directed his attention to

questioning the need for the classification of waste and whether the term was, in fact, redundant. He argued for rethinking the lifecycle of consumables, proclaiming:

If all matter could be put in its right place, or to its right use, a variety of terms for waste would disappear altogether, or change their signification. There would be no such things as weeds, rubbish, litter, refuse, offal, and dregs, in their present sense; and these words would either become obsolete or get blended with other associations.

(Simmonds 1873, p. 18)

Simmonds compiled an encyclopaedic response to the growing quantities of discarded or worn-out merchandise and their production leftovers. My interest in Simmonds' work developed from his writings to his role as curator of 'waste object' exhibitions, which contemplated possibilities for the design cycle to delete the concept of waste. He curated displays that were staged at the Vienna International Exhibition in 1872 and at the Bethnal Green Museum. Simmonds speculated about recyclable applications for a vast range of resources from tin kettles and fish scales to coal dust and dog skin. Fashion featured prominently, with investigative solutions proffered about the reuse of discarded steel crinolines for rose trellises (Simmonds 1873, p. 452) and the making of desert jelly from old boots (Simmonds 1873, p. 89).

Simmonds' work was a key driver in the project, sparking reflections about material states and the idea of fashion waste or detritus far removed from the romantic or poetic notions I studied in either the sensibility of ruins or Benjamin's 'motley cadaver'. Although many of Simmonds' solutions might now seem ridiculous, there is something quite profound in the logical way he addressed the accumulations of things and his rethinking of habitual processes of consumption and abandonment. The collections of fashion in museums are the repository for many abandoned and used clothes (Palmer 2005) and I found in looking at the nature of these collections a method for speculation about how fashion consumption is expressed. In projecting a dialogue of wear in *Noble rot* I realised that with no interference from remedial actions or revival techniques I had documented both fashion consumption and obsolescence.

## COLLABORATIVE PRACTICE

My curatorial proposition for *Noble rot* was that the fragile and fugitive states of fashion suggest a museum dialogue about wear. The intention in the second exhibition was to evoke a series of responses to the National Trust's fashion collection, to devise an assemblage of thoughts and encounters about dressing and wear. In this framing I sought to experiment with standard historic narratives of nineteenth-century fashionable dress. From the beginning of the project I departed from the didactic recording of 'past' dressed fashions to test further possibilities for the collection to act as a creative catalyst in 'exhibition' making. And I understood this neglected narrative of wear had the potential to bring together a range of 'voices'. The contemporary arts colloquium held at the Kunstverein Munich, Germany, in 2004 noted collaborative practice was 'doing things ... that would not be possible to do individually' (quoted in Howard 2008, Collaborative practices para.). I reiterated this in *Noble rot*, where the scope of the collection was extended by gathering together a range of people and practices.

The project therefore created an exploratory opportunity for various practices to respond to a heritage environment, in the experience of the house and garden, the ephemeral and the National Trust collection. Here, the practices of curatorship, poetry, fashion design, communication design and textile science were traversed. The collaboration moved the project into areas of social history, science, the world of living things, contemporary design and navigation. Working together with a number of collaborators facilitated my practice both in the exchange of ideas and experimentation with curatorial practices. I saw the collaborations performing in a radial arrangement to converge together in the epicentre of the *Noble rot* exhibition.

Through the bringing-together process I became aware that the Noble rot brief and the heritage environment it involved posed a number of challenges. The Como situation, for instance, contrasted to the cultural program produced by the heritage estate, Belsay Hall, Castle and Gardens, of the UK National Trust, where the property is empty of furnishings. At Belsay, the original Middleton bequest enforces the



**3.61**

First floor, Bathroom,  
Charles H. Holmes, South Melbourne,  
*Boot* c.1915,  
*Noble Rot* 2006, photographer Ming Tee.



Como's furniture - wardrobes, drawers, tables, even the bath - will play host to the fashion pieces. Unseen spaces, such as servant's stairwells, offer secret, fleeting glimpses of trailing costume.



Noble Rot offers a range of voices including: a major installation by the fashion label SIX-The Gold Room  
a collection of writing by the award winning poet Carolyn Leach-Paholski  
communication design by Keith Deverall (Greyspace)

and decay in the final, ephemeral decay of their dissipation.



A collection established in the 1960s from the costume holdings of the National Trust Australia Victoria, focusing on items from the 18th century to now. The Noble Rot is sourced from the dress culture of Australians, a dress culture of Australians. The Noble Rot draws its attention to the Trust's collection as a site for creative inspiration, critical research, and engagement.

VIEW FROM DOORWAY

NOBLE HOT FLOOR PLANS. COMO HOUSE 2000

**3.62**

*Noble rot map 2006*  
designed by Keith Deverall



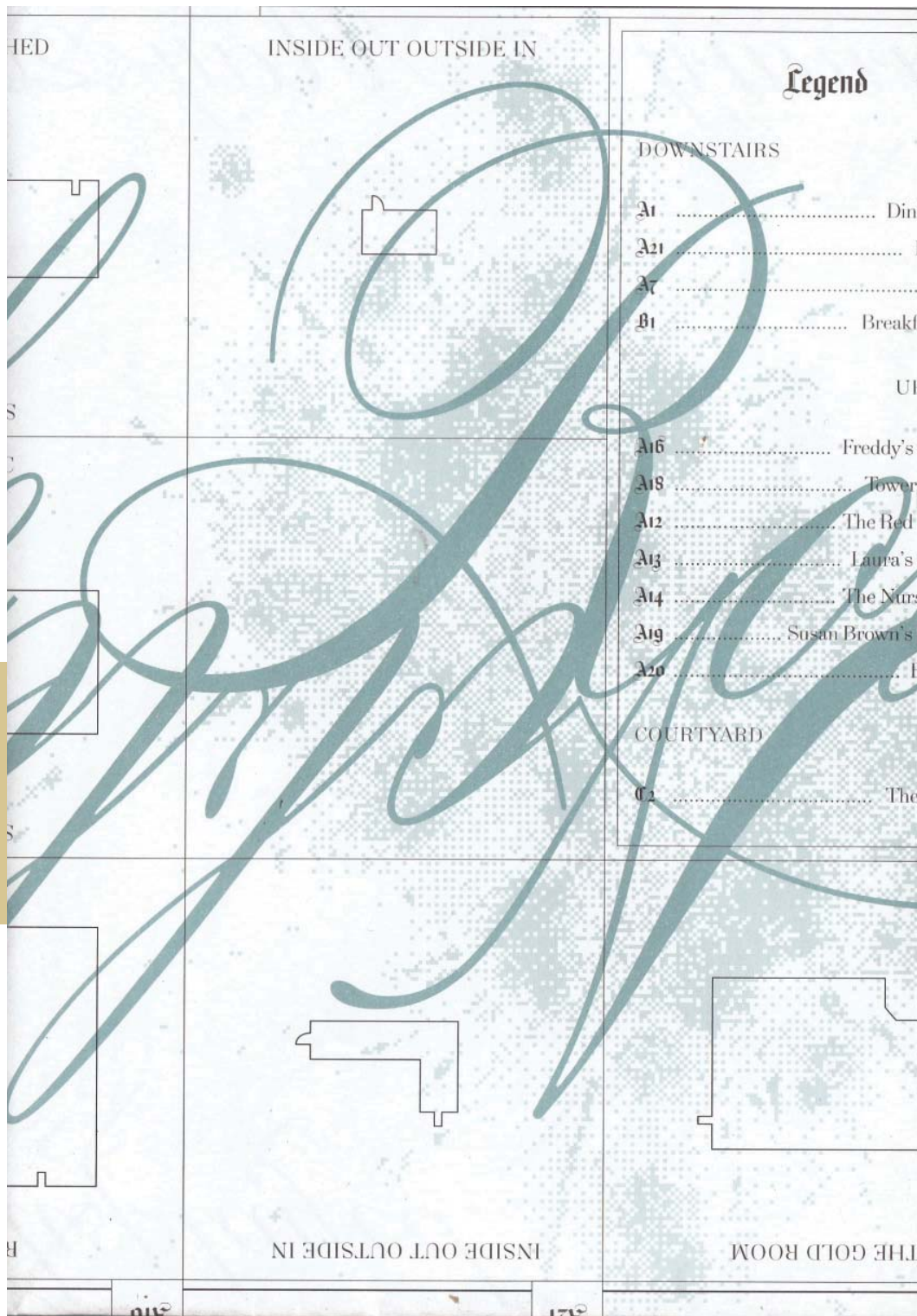
### 3.63

*Noble rot: an alternate view of fashion*

2006 catalogue cover

unfurnished appearance and prevents the historic recreation of how the family once lived (Jones 2007). Instead, regular commissioned exhibitions are staged, where practitioners respond to the location and fill the spaces. Fashion designers were invited to Belsay in 2004 and an installation by Stella McCartney, of a horse shaped curtain made from Swarovski crystals, was inspired and designed specifically for the castle's great hall. The Historic Houses Trust of Sydney holds similar programs at Elizabeth Bay House, featuring regular artist installations that respond to the house and its previous residents, the Macleay family (Barrett & Carlin 2007). When the Armytage family handed over Como to the National Trust in 1959, the intention was to continue presenting the lifestyle of its past occupants. This understanding of inhabitation implicit both in the set up of the Trust property and in the collaborators' occupation of the site pervaded the *Noble rot* project, creating both a sense of place and residency of wear.

How the installation would navigate the house and how the community could move through the house were the first aspects of the project developed by the communication designer, Keith Deverall. A house index was devised where Como's standard floor plans were redrawn to create new ones. Rooms were plotted out in a new order, which reconfigured the physical navigation of the house expressed by the recent *Noble rot* inhabitations. Deverall recalled, 'by exploding the standard Como house floor plans rooms become separate entities and free both the house and the people moving through the house from the traditional and prescribed labels and pathways that have developed over time' (Healy 2006b n.p.). The new migration pattern through the house took the community along a pathway marked out by the worn out. Text accompanying each installation was integrated into the historic surroundings. Deverall designed the label scheme 'to become part of its weaving, poetic narrative, not to sit over the top of the exhibition and the garments on display' (Healy 2006b n.p.). For each room there was a corresponding textual device. In Freddie's room, for instance, there was a sermon book where exhibition participants could read the identification details for the mourning clothes on display. In the dining room, a table plan positioned on the music stand identified the seating arrangements and the object's label information. The inhabitation of the house by *Noble rot* extended into the treatment of the exhibit labels by the design approach. The label was considered as another household



# Legend

## DOWNSTAIRS

- A1 ..... Dini
- A21 ..... E
- A7 .....
- B1 ..... Breakfa

## UP

- A16 ..... Freddy's I
- A18 ..... Tower
- A12 ..... The Red I
- A13 ..... Laura's I
- A14 ..... The Nurs
- A19 ..... Susan Brown's I
- A20 ..... B

## COURTYARD

- C1 ..... The

3.64

Noble rot: an alternate  
view of fashion  
2006 map wrapper



## CHECKLIST

## DINING ROOM A-1

## DINING TABLE

## FRANCE

Waistcoat 1702-1714

*silk, cotton, paper, ink*  
handwritten label, discoloured

## ENGLAND

Evening bodice c.1860

*silk, cotton*  
yellowed

## ENGLAND

Evening bodice c.1865

*silk, cotton*  
yellowed, stained

Worn by Anne Louise Curwen,  
Melbourne

'Shepherdess' bodice

from fancy dress costume c.1895

*silk*  
shattered

Wedding bodice c.1875

*silk, cotton*  
soiled, discoloured

## AUSTRALIA

Bodice from a boy's dress c.1860

*silk, cotton*  
stained, darned

Worn to Government House party  
by a four year old boy

ROBERTSON & MOFFAT, Melbourne

Ballgown bodice c.1895

*silk*  
shattered, in tatters, yellowed

## AUSTRALIA

Bodice c.1870

*silk, cotton, boning*  
sweat pads, yellowed, shattered  
Worn by Lady Martin, wife of the  
Premier of NSW Sir James Martin,  
Kt., QC from 16 Dec 1870 to 13  
May 1872

## ENGLAND

Man's waistcoat 1750

*cotton, silk*  
soiled

Wedding waistcoat 1800s

*silk, cotton*  
inside out, fox print lining  
soiled with holes

## SIDEBOARD

## ENGLAND

Apron c.1720

*silk, metallic threads*  
splitting, tarnished

## STUDY A-7

## OCTAGONAL SHOWCASE

Queen Victoria's seal

Ribbon from Queen Victoria's  
Wedding dress 1840

Red feather from H.R.H The Prince  
of Wales hat, worn on his second  
birthday at Windsor Castle Novem-  
ber 9<sup>th</sup> 1843

Commemorative ribbon to celebrate  
the victory at Waterloo 1815

Gloves worn by H.R.H The Princess  
Royal Victoria, Queen Victoria's  
eldest child

Sleeping cap worn by  
H.R.H The Prince of Wales

'Mother's Buttonholes  
worked 1898'

First prize Wolseley  
Horticultural, Floricultural  
and Industrial Society

Selection of postcards from  
the Armytage family

Feather flower c.1865

Joker playing card from  
the Armytage family

Handkerchief 'FAE Bond' c.1900

Letter from Constance Armytage to  
Clive Armytage, 21 October, 1914

## BOOKCASE

Gordon Ogden, *The Kingdom  
of Dust*, Chicago, 1912.

Gordon Ogden, *The Kingdom  
of Dust*, Chicago, 1912.

*The Universal Instructor and  
Manual of General Reference*,  
Melbourne, 1882.

Letter from Constance Armytage to  
Clive Armytage, 21 October, 1914

## BACK HALL A-21

## SUSPENSION ON THE STAIRWELL

Crinoline 1850s

*silk, baleen*  
discoloured, distorted

## BOOKCASE BUTLER'S PANTRY

*The Best Way Book*

*A Practical Household Guide*,  
Written by Housewives  
for Housewives, London, 1909.

## BREAKFAST ROOM-B1

## NEST OF TABLES

Pillowslip

My own and my mother's

Wedding dress married in 1815.

I was married 1844 I put the  
dresses away on 4<sup>th</sup> November 1898  
stained

Drawstring bag-for storage  
of Wedding veil  
stained

## TABLE

Collection of Wedding  
bouquets and garlands  
discoloured, brittle,  
crumbling

## CHAIR

Wedding dress 1875

Bodice, overskirt, skirt  
*silk, cotton*  
shattered, faded, stained  
underarms

## WHAT-NOT

PINET, Paris

Boots c.1887

*silk, cotton, leather*  
soiled, frayed, discoloured

Worn by Mrs Dyson at her wedding  
in Melbourne, 1887

## GAMES TABLE

MRS HERWOOD, Richmond  
Wedding dress, veil and  
underwear 1922

*silk, lamé, cotton*  
old confetti caught  
in hem of dress

## SCREEN

Wedding dress c. 1860  
(inside out)

*silk, cotton*  
lining iron mould staining,  
discoloured

## BEHIND SCREEN

Wedding dress 1878  
*wool, cotton, silk*  
moth-eaten, stained

## FIRST FLOOR

## STAIRWELL-A18

ROBERTSON & MOFFAT, Melbourne  
Wedding dress, 2 petticoats,  
part of a five-piece ensemble  
c.1885

inside-out,  
handkerchief in pocket  
*silk, cotton, boning, elastic*  
crushed, distorted, broken  
stitches, yellowed, torn

## BATHROOM-A20

## BATH

## ENGLAND

Frockcoat jacket c.1895  
*wool, silk*

discoloured, frayed

Worn in 1895

by Mr. George Peck

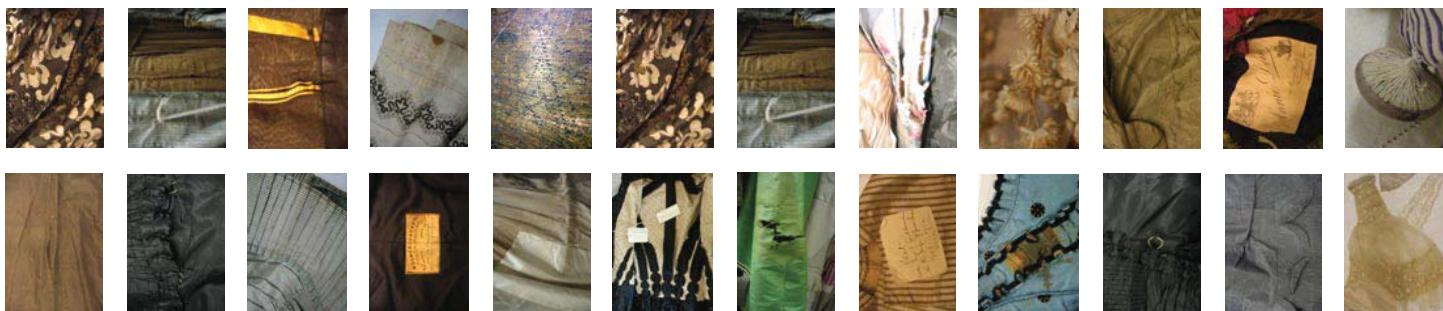
Annie Butterworth, *Household  
Work and Management*, Domestic  
Arts Department, University  
College of Hutchinson & Co.  
London, 1902

Private collection

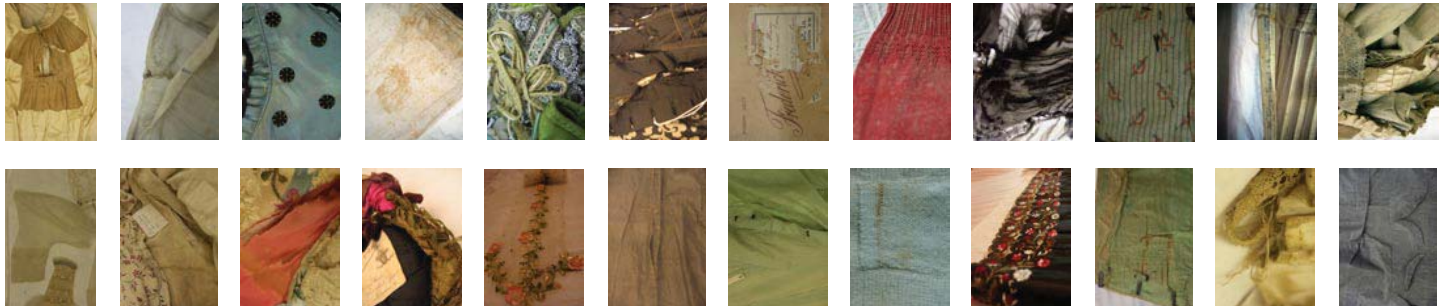
## 3.65

Catalogue checklist from

*Noble Rot: an alternate view  
of fashion 2006*







### 3.66

Details of garments from  
*Noble rot: an alternate view  
 of fashion 2006*

chattel, blending in to the domestic surroundings.

Deverall also designed a small exhibition catalogue. The cover artwork was illustrated with a collection of flower rubbings pressed from the Como garden by Anya-Petrivna. The delicacy of the stains evoked the sensibility of the ephemeral and traced the presence of something left behind. As mentioned earlier, the inclusion of stained clothes was a bold gesture in the installation. And the stains from the garden also made a powerful yet mundane connection to the household, the beauty of these markings drawing similarities to the poetics of the disfigured fashion surfaces. However, the stains were an inconspicuous layer disguised by the *Noble rot* house plan folded into a slip-cover. Produced after the opening of the exhibition, the checklist was interleaved with poetry, table plans, post-exhibition reflections and contemporary fashion.

The natural course of decay was described in a series of contemporary writings created specifically for the *Noble rot* installation to provide a counterpoint to the nineteenth-century literature interspersed in the exhibition. The poet Carolyn Leah-Paholski was not particularly interested in writing descriptively about clothes; instead she chose to concentrate upon the sensuous nature of decomposition. She recalls in correspondence during the early stages of the project, 'It is their state of decay which is the point of interest and which provides me with a road in. In writing both poetry and fiction I have been much concerned with the nature of matter, its material, its making, the process of maturation, the inevitable running down' (2006). After viewing sweat-stained bodices in the National Trust collection, Leah-Paholski began to contemplate how the garments were once worn. Instead of recalling a nostalgic glamour for 'past' fashions she was struck by the burden of being fashionable. The domestic routine of Como's household, the tough Australian lifestyle and extreme climate inspired her verse. In the poem 'Dancing the quadrille in one hundred degrees' Leah-Paholski focused upon dressing up and the oppressive nature of fashionable dress worn during the harsh summers. Imagining women moving about in nineteenth-century corsets or complicated clothing forms inspired her.



### 3.67

Detail from Unknown  
*Bodice* c.1870,  
*Noble rot* 2006

### 3.68

Detail from Unknown,  
*Child's pinafore* 1790,  
*Noble rot* 2006..

1882 — It's stinking February day  
and the little girls are dancing,  
Heat sick flies sequin the bodice backs,  
hum on the salt sweat through their dresses...

Skip, dip and skating  
on the polished timbers  
their underthings gone stiff with salt  
the linens evolving into leathers.

(Healy 2006b, n.p.)

Leah-Paholski's study of the household activities included the vegetable patch, which brought pungent smells and the sensual occurrence of decay into the installation. The seasonal transformations of the garden connected with the wear of things, the inevitable running down and renewal processes.

The nineteenth-century diaries of Como's head gardener, William Sangster, recorded the estate's seasonal plantings and produce and other garden activities. Leah-Paholski's poem 'William Sangster's broad beans' witnesses the changing garden aesthetics of the seasons and complements the temporal appearances critiqued in *Noble rot*:

By December the vines are sun killed  
and hanging shameful from still firm finger holds...

Pick the missed pods now for seed as large and leather as ears,  
they are a currency painted into tight skin

(Healy 2006b, n.p.).

These poetic responses contrast with the scientific findings compiled by textile scientist Mac Fergusson.



### 3.69-3.71

Undercover,  
Jun Takahashi spring/summer 2005  
ready-to-wear collection. Published at  
[www.style.com/fashionshows/  
complete/S2005RTW-UNDERCOV](http://www.style.com/fashionshows/complete/S2005RTW-UNDERCOV)

While the work of Leah-Paholski engaged with the flux of seasonal changes, the areas of domestic science and forensic science were another way to understand the nature of physical appearance. *Noble rot* is explained pragmatically in this circumstance by instability and breakdown of chemical compounds. Fergusson examined seven items from the *Noble rot* installation using macroscopic and microscopic methods, and ultraviolet light. His response to the exhibition was a series of short reports. I noticed the inclusion of scientific dialogue acted like a footnote to the installation, providing an explanatory text to demystify observational data and the experience of changing appearance. The analysis of the material composition of a specific item attempted to identify components destructive to its condition. In his examination of an eighteenth-century muslin pinafore Fergusson acknowledged the identification of blood stains, evidence of mildew and the extensive yellowing caused by ageing and unstable environmental conditions. The scientific reports appraised levels of disintegration and delivered a matter-of-fact analysis about selected garments. This information aimed to logically explain why the condition was altered.

Similarly to a museum conservation report, Fergusson described an object's condition and proposed and documented remedial actions. Recently, Alexandra Palmer at Canada's Royal Ontario Museum announced her plans to feature information about scientific analysis in her future fashion exhibitions (Palmer 2008). The aim of her proposal to include forensic type reports was to highlight a garment's physical change and form a parallel scientific dialogue alongside the standard design narrative. She anticipated sharing with the community records of conservation treatments with timetabling and costs to indicate museum preparation processes and document the often complicated and comprehensive treatments undertaken. Palmer's inclusive exchange disseminates specialised and often privileged information and shares museum organisational systems with the community. Her response to the breakdown of fashion is an institutional one, which records how the museum meticulously cares for and maintains the semblance of an object. In contrast, in the *Noble rot* installations I was not conveying the museum's customary response to condition. The representation of fashionable clothing in authentic states conversed with the cycle of fashion and the transformational processes occurring from actions of wear. I intended *Noble rot* to capture the nature of



fashion, through the sense of transience. In an alternative history of fashion I suggested a dialogue of wear to encompass fashion's demise instead of documenting or proposing resurrection of the original form.



**3.72**

The croquet lawn, 2009





**3.73** (left)

*SIX Lace lawn,  
Noble rot 2006*

**3.74-75** (right)

*SIX Exterior lace windows,  
Noble rot 2006*

## CONTEMPORARY POETICS AND POLITICS OF DECAY

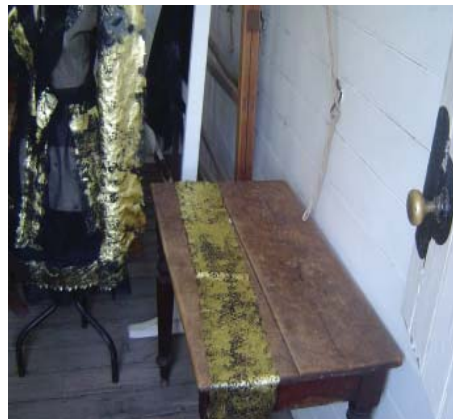
As mentioned earlier, I found the shifting surfaces and deterioration of old fashionable garments to be deeply moving. It generates extraordinary compositions, from the construction of devastation of shredded silk to mottled marbling formed by ironmould. These unsettling states have also aroused contemporary fashion designers who have appropriated such appearances both as an aesthetic and as a sign. In the 1970s, the fetishist desire for new clothes and appearances stirred British designers Malcolm McLaren and Vivienne Westwood to advocate an anti-establishment aesthetic based on the worn out. The production of t-shirts and trousers deliberately soiled, ripped and decorated with worthless objects or out-of-date materials placed the wearer on the edge (Stolpher & Wilson 2004). Garments already defiled by past actions, suggesting combat or other heroic gestures, were inciting a reaction. Here, the surfaces of wear were provocations about the political and social situations of the day. The 'destroy' shirt, popularly known as Sid Vicious's uniform in the punk band the Sex Pistols, literally invited the purposeful act of ruin and celebrated states of uselessness.

Contemporary designers founding a vocabulary for 'new' design drawn from worn out and discarded clothes include Rei Kawakubo of Comme des Garçons, Hussein Chalayan, John Galliano, Martin Margiela and Jun Takahashi. Caroline Evans observed, 'rather than simply configuring images of dereliction, these designers introduce the idea of narrative and history into their clothes' (2006, p. 257). The revival of the derelict state embedded into these new fashions I contend to be the forgotten or absent narrative and history of dressing and wear. The work of Jun Takahashi for the label Undercover has a particular resonance to my project because of his explorations about how things come together and eventually fall apart. His collection 'Scabs' (spring/summer 2003) implied bodies and clothes were in a state of ruin as clothes initially ripped to shreds were sewn back together with a surgeon's suture, hinting at the fragility of existence. The collection 'Homage to Jan Svankmajer' (spring/summer 2005) involved disintegration not from clothing breaking down but from images of domestic interiors; the exterior of the garment simulated dilapidated conditions of hard surfaces with effects of peeling, cracking or the internal stuffing falling out. I saw Takahashi's play with

embodiment suggest clothing as both a second skin and a dwelling. In dressing the house I sought ways to reference these varied fashion spaces, making the surfaces and voids known by a sense of embodiment and inhabitation.

The premise I suggested for constructing an alternative fashion history through a dialogue of wear expressed a similar design sensibility to that of Belgian designer Martin Margiela. In his design process Margiela uses old clothes to design new ones. However, the foundation of his method departs from the customary revival or sustainable trends prevalent in fashion. Barbara Vinken argues his tactic 'is not a matter here of ecological recycling, of the creation of the new out of the old for pragmatic-ethical reasons. On the contrary it is a matter of showing the old as old – an altogether aesthetic manoeuvre' (Vinken 2005, p. 69). While the restoration methods inherent in the fashion system continue to maintain and restore appearances in an attempt to disguise or slow down temporal change, Margiela's concern lies in its facilitation: that perhaps in the processes of transformation there is something quite compelling about encountering the spectacle of fashion's metamorphosis. Margiela's Rotterdam exhibition of eighteen garments modelled from recycled 'old' clothes is activated by the additional infusion of bacterial growth to accelerate decay. These extraordinary circumstances result in fashioning 'living' garments, the pieces teeming with organisms. In this poetic and scientific sequence of clothing transformation, Margiela created a visual metaphor about transience: the disintegrating garments supporting the life of decay. Ingrid Loschek makes reference to the exhibition's critique of the frenetic consumer cycle, and the eventual discarding of old dress (1999, p. 146). Comments by the exhibition's curator, Thimo te Duits, recalled how the installation became a natural habitat for other creatures, giving 'house-room to a dear little spider, whose web caught plenty of prey, creatures found in great numbers on the stinking and sometimes decaying textiles' (Debo 2002, p. 157). The merging or dissolution of the artificial gallery environment into the outside surroundings introduces a spontaneous, unpredictable exhibition course for observing the changing appearance of the exhibition itself. An exhibition designed to embrace natural transience disrupted the static or frozen environment implied by garments being placed in a museum condition. In a similar way, the *Noble rot* installations subverted the controlled





**3.76**

*SIX Interior Lace windows,  
Noble rot 2006*

**3.77**

*SIX The Laundry,  
The Gold room installation,  
Noble rot 2006*

**3.78**

*SIX The Laundry,  
The Gold room installation,  
Noble rot 2006*



environment of the museum; spilling over into the garden and the outbuildings transformed the way the installation evolved.

Among the *Noble rot* collaborators were the Australian designers Peter Boyd and Denise Sprynskji from the fashion practice SIX. Their *The gold room collection*, elicited from the idea of the worn, also stretched the parameters supposed by an exhibition space. They responded to the National Trust collection with an expression of impermanence and play with shifting surfaces. SIX investigated the destructive qualities of decay in their designs and corresponding installation, studying the degradation of surface and material composition. Their design of a collection of garments decorated with gold foiling represented the antithesis of decay and worthlessness.

SIX selected the material gold to highlight their collection of garments because it is a highly valued substance and maintains a lustre that never breaks down. They applied multiple zippers to garments for the purpose of reconfiguration, to relocate components and change the shape of the clothing form. Their process of disfigurement simulated random acts of destruction caused by decay. However, it was the lace that defined SIX's installation. Boyd and Sprynskji give the following details of this device: 'Worn-out clothing often has holes; ironically we chose lace a decorative device made of a network of holes as our principle motif. It became our template, spraying through the lace, making pattern. Looking at the costume collection, we were very attracted to the lace, more than anything else. There were many costumes, where borders of lace were falling off, hanging, delicate and very vulnerable' (Healy 2006b, SIX section). The notion of detached or abandoned lace wandered across the entire installation, whether stencilled on the lawn or transferred onto a window-pane. The poetics of holes, whether exploited in constructed or deconstructed materials, gave licence to the interplay between a solid surface and a void. I noticed that SIX applied lace as a seeing device which masked the impression of the garment (Healy 2006b, SIX section). I saw in this translation the creative comprehension of the worn-out condition. Where the appearance of the garment becomes blurred, the solid form corrupted, was an allusion to deterioration and fragility evoked by the transparency of the material form. In their transformable design, the final state of the garment was never completed or resolved. The gold



**3.79**

SIX The Laundry,  
*The Gold room installation,*  
*Noble rot 2006*



**3.80**  
The Laundry,  
outbuilding, 2009



foil impressed upon garments simulated a worn-down pattern, implying that the surface would eventually crack with wear and continue to fragment and transform.

*The gold room* was installed in the laundry where the garments acted like a decorative ploy, hanging from coathangers, suspended from laundry rafters or lying across an ironing board, their glittering gold surfaces blinding the viewer, the rich appearances hiding their vulnerability and active break down. The laundry is a curious site, chosen by SIX because it was ‘an unexpected place ... an exposed site’. The laundry, set away from the main house, receives minimal protection from weather, theft, or rodents. It is an arduous environment, designed to maintain appearances through eradication of dirt. In the laundry, as in the outdoors space employed by Margiela, I observed tension between the specialised exhibition environment proposed by the controlled conditions of museum display and the vulnerability posed by an outhouse. SIX designed fashion that relied upon the exploitation of transformative states; their fugitive designs were made to configure in various ways and appearances. *The gold room* installation showed a contemporary design practice’s adoption of an intentional design of flux. I saw SIX’s appropriation of the decay process as not simply a decorative scheme; they applied the method of transformation for garment realisation. The breakdown of matter, associated forms and aesthetics were used to generate new designs.

## OUTWORN WORN OUT

In the *Noble rot* exhibition I suggested a new understanding of fashion by re-contextualising or revitalising fashionable clothing remains. I posed new associations for fashion derived from this detritus through studying the effects/affects of wear and the worn. These particular dressing nuances conveyed familiar clothing narratives and fashion language about activities related to necessity, robust activity, frequent use, misadventure and sentiment. In the identification of particular associations drawn between the conditions of use/wear and decay/worn, I proposed an alternative history of fashion. In considering dressing conditions and temporal change, I discovered an understanding of fashion expressed by the ephemeral or transitory. The dialogue of wear was a counterpoint to customary representational forms of the museum exhibition. I found a sense of connectivity to the wearer in these curatorial explorations by associations to residency. The state of 'exhausted by use' was observed through inhabitation, and the intimate occupations of the interior settings, furniture and fashionable dress.

The reading of Como and its fashion collection was expanded through this exhibition. The dressing of the house presented a post-colonial narrative that proposed new relations with the inhabitants. The dining room installation for example contradicted conventions of social etiquette and respectability with an adverse representation of the fashionable occupants. The encounter with dirty or dishevelled garments juxtaposed in the grand dining room showed the vulnerability of social structures and inevitable demise of ideal appearances. In disrupting the ordered setting of both the table layout and house museum installation, the presence of bodily excretions on garments conveyed a more mundane interpretation of the inhabitants and circumstances of wear. Lady Martin's bodice for instance highlighted the visceral or abject aspects of the body by drawing attention to yellowed sweat pads, showing the labour of dressing through the interaction between the body and clothing. While the installation of the stained boy's bodice, portrayed an unseemly image of childhood. By curating the National Trust fashion collection in this manner, the garments were a provocation within the house creating different associations to past inhabitants. I believe *Noble rot* uncovered



3.81

First floor the stairwell Unknown,  
*Skirt from a ballgown c.1860,*  
*Noble rot 2006,*  
photographer Ming Tee.



potent readings of historical fashion that were not homogenised or predictable. The installation revealed the diversity of clothing cultures represented in the National Trust collection by looking at opportunities for the collection to be curated in many ways. In this exploration I questioned the display condition, in particular the expectation for garments to be viewed conserved and in pristine states, as the garments selected for *Noble rot* were shown in states of deterioration. The exhibition conveyed to the viewer that there was no fixed condition for display or dressed appearance and gave a sense of bodily relations to fashion.

Engagement with the National Trust collection provided a way to reconsider fashion. Public response to the project showed an empathy with the proposition of wear. Anthony Gardner's review noted:

This is one of the many 'double effects' that pervade *Noble rot*. The modishness of fashion is played against the ephemeral and wear-and-tear of the clothes themselves. Mourning gowns and petticoats made of exquisite black silk haunt a young boy's bedroom. Discarded underwear and nineteenth-century wedding dresses lie strewn across a breakfast room in a manner that would have been shamefully impolitic in Victorian era Melbourne. (Gardner 2006, exhibition review section)

The curation of over one hundred and fifty exhibition items was an ambitious undertaking. I found the heritage environment heightened the wear trajectory. The connections made between architecture and fashion and the notion of inhabitation was an unexpected outcome, which became a definitive element in the research process through the spirit of the collaborations and the 'dressing' of the house.

The creative potency of studying the wear of old clothes was revealed by the collaborations within the project, which instilled an eclectic profile and forged a certain disorder within the project by creating a dialogue formed by the many voices. I found the method of undressing/dressing facilitated a particular visual language which enabled me to critique curatorial practices by delving into the nature of fashion appearances and the experience of wear through the embodiment of space. The worn/decay narrative established a sense of wearing fashion and a dialogue of wear by looking at different forms of access both to collection states and to the passage through the house.



3.82

*Petal dust -Moth preventer,  
floral air purifier  
c.1889, Noble rot 2006*

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## ENDNOTES

- <sup>i</sup> Warhol's statement referred to human demeanour in the context of television appearances; how people come together only when the camera is turned on. It was an analogy for public appearances in *Noble rot*.
- <sup>ii</sup> The fictitious character Miss Havisham from Charles Dickens *Great expectations*, first published 1861 by Chapman and Hall, London. A wealthy spinster, she lived in her dilapidated house, wearing her aging wedding dress, from the day she was jilted.
- <sup>iii</sup> *Raid the icebox 1* Museum of Art of the Rhode Island School of Design staged in 1969, selected by Andy Warhol from basement storage.
- <sup>iv</sup> *Andy Warhol's 'folk and funk'* Museum of American Folk Art 20/9–19/11 1977.  
Referenced Leopardi's satirical nineteenth-century essay, 'The Dialogue between Fashion and Death' in *The Moral essays* [Operette morali], 1832
- <sup>v</sup> Tatters referred to torn and ragged clothing. A tatterdemalion was a ragged child, person dressed in old clothes 1608.
- <sup>vi</sup> 'Como Historic House and Garden Statement of Significance' 2007.
- <sup>vii</sup> The Burra Charter is the standard for best practice in the conservation of heritage places in Australia. The guideline was originally formulated in 1977 at a meeting in the mining town of Burra Burra in South Australia by the newly formed Australia International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS).
- <sup>viii</sup> Carolyn Armytage was born 1832 and died in 1909; her daughter Ethel died in 1872, aged seven, and son Freddie died in 1910 aged 37.
- <sup>ix</sup> Frederick Felix Armytage (1873-1910)
- <sup>x</sup> CS Lewis, *The lion, the witch and the wardrobe*, first published 1950.

<sup>xi</sup> A butler's mirror was a convex mirror designed to reflect the whole room, so the butler could keep his eye on the dinner guests with his back turned.

<sup>xii</sup> Lady Martin, wife of the premier of NSW from 1870 to 1872

<sup>xiii</sup> Bethnal Green Museum, London, opened in 1872 as a branch of the South Kensington Museum, London (later the Victoria & Albert Museum). The museum's opening displays displayed two collections from the Great Exhibition representing food and animal products. In 1974 the institution refocused the collection and became the Museum of Childhood (Museum of Childhood 2009, History of the Museum section).

<sup>xiv</sup> Jan Svankmayer (born 1934 Czechoslovakia) known for surreal animations and film.

<sup>xv</sup> Martin Margiela 9/4/1615, Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam June 6 - August 17 1997. For exhibition details and critique see Evans (1998).



FASHION STRIPPED BARE: Concluding remarks





*all-pervading ease of a well-known rite:  
the furs, the fans, the gloves, the feathers,  
the fishnet stockings,  
in short the whole spectrum of adornment*

Roland Barthes *Striptease* (2000, p. 85)

In imagining Carlyle's 'world out of clothes', with trails of sprawling garments abandoned across its surface, I suggested a striptease of sorts as a potential methodology for curating the fashion exhibition in the museum. This burlesque tradition of taking off clothes – 'the act of becoming bare' (Barthes 1972, p. 84) – was a means to review both the nature of my practice and the expression of fashion in the museum. The two major theoretical figures Carlyle and Barthes introduced into my research ideas relating to the individualisation of the garment form. Carlyle's view of the world proposed through the metaphor of clothing started my reflection upon varying events and circumstances surrounding the experience of wear. In challenging the dressed composition found in the ideal form of fashion exhibitions, undressing and the experience of empty dress moved the research into exploring more divergent associations through the use of visual puns and uncanny juxtapositions. I discovered in Barthes' distinctions between *dress* and *dressing* a way to experience fashion by presenting clothing detail in sensuous, spontaneous and less conventional display configurations. The shifting forms and appearances observed in the exhibitions curated for the project suggested displaying transformational states of fashion to represent the relations between clothing and the body. Observation and exposure of idiosyncratic features of dressing became a major component of the project. In displaying varied viewpoints of the garment form I created new associations and interpretations of fashion in the museum.

This research has led me to engage with a range of participatory practices. The wearing of clothes was the premise for studying fashion and it facilitated extending both the nature of my practice and the museum experience of fashion. At the beginning of the research I was conscious of following particular protocols and ordering systems both in the routine of my practice and in the representational forms of fashion found in the museum. During the project, as I engaged with speculative practices to extend research in the field, these parameters were tested. I began to recognise that my research was more about testing systems of classification used either for dressing or within the museum; this reflected my fascination with or aversion to institutional frameworks and the habitual practices of routine.

As I reflected on research I noticed that my practice was about inclusiveness evidenced in the way I continually looked at methods to share the curatorial experiences of objects and fashion. In this way I was

continually testing strategies to extend the museum domains of accessibility to material objects which is contrary to the customary practices of restrictions or limited contact. Throughout the project, therefore, I brokered the museum system to increase access to a diversity of experiences for the exhibition visitor. I experimented with the exhibition model for fashion in exploring various ways of looking, making associations to actions, social networks and surroundings to converse with diverse dressing experiences.

The research question opened up my practice resulting in an expansion of existing representational models for fashion in the museum. By searching for missing dialogues I discovered the absence of expressions related to the nature of fashion as a manifestation of the ephemeral; there was little that captured the sense of fragility or vulnerability of things. I followed a path of studying the transitory, the instability of material forms and shifting states of fashion like those mentioned in Simmonds' nineteenth-century recollection:

The utmost exaggeration seems to exist in  
the prices put upon the bonnets.  
In the first place, the article almost as soon  
as seen; in the next, it possesses no resource  
whatever; and, above all it is liable to far greater  
deterioration than the dress. The habit of leaning  
back in the carriage, which has become so  
general, destroys the bonnet immediately,  
and renders it shabby in form, even while still  
bright and fresh in colour.

(Simmonds 1873, p. 274)

In questioning the display condition of the museum I initially aimed to critique the selection, conservation and exhibition structures of the museum and explore how these affected the experience of fashion. I recognised a gap in fashion scholarship concerning exhibition dissemination and theorisation about wearer dialogue and

dressing practices in relation to this. The two exhibitions of this PHD investigation were exploratory in nature and sought to study the display condition for fashion. However, during the research this focus shifted as I became more concerned with the occupation of clothing and the social space of fashion.

In *The blue dress* I curated the gestures of dressing. I studied the capacity of appearances and transformational states to convey a sense of fashion connected to the wearer. The mundane events of undressing were arranged in the exhibition to elicit an alternative display model to the 'plastical' quality formed by dressed appearances. In seeking the missing dialogues of museum displays I sought to investigate new readings of historical fashion, which were less inclusive or familiar. The premise of the thriller was a device to observe the garment and gather information about the 'absent' wearer through changes in the display positioning. These installations constructed the museum narrative by imagining the wearer through material gesture and traces of wear. This approach challenged conventional historical interpretations of dress. The presentation of the past embodiment or 'haunting' of the dress proposed an open narrative to reconstruct the historical life of the object, one that relied on participatory practices to compose relations between the body and dress. Personification of the dress proposed in the thriller facilitated new readings of the museum object associated with both the social life of the dress and its context within the National Wool Museum.

In *Noble rot* I curated the fragile and fugitive states of fashion to suggest a museum dialogue of wear. In these curatorial diversions I tested the capacity for exhibitions to express ideas of use (Baudrillard 2002). I presented the qualities of wear through gesture and deteriorating surfaces to display sensual and dilapidated states. In these excursions I noticed the potential for studying fashion through a cycle of consumption and circulation.

In the project I noticed two quite different meanings associated with or suggested by wear:

- wear/use as the activity of dressing, the acts of fashion
- worn/decay as the exhausted state of fashion produced by accumulated dressing activities, spatial and temporal change

The arrangement of clothing in conventional museum displays of fashion has fixed upon the dressed composition. The extensive repertoire or inventory of dressing acts I accumulated in the two exhibitions offered ways to understand fashion outside the narrative represented by mannequin displays. The project expanded the museum dialogue about fashion by engaging with activities of wear. Fashion was curated as an everyday event showing the relationship between the garment and the wearer. I played with states of undressing and dressing to instil the museum genre with a sense of liveliness and performance.

The qualities of dressing expressed in these exhibitions showed the potential for sharing or participating in fashion without trying on clothes or experiencing clothes in motion. The complexity expressed by states of wear enabled reading fashion as a participatory practice; clothing was explicitly displayed as a social object. The exhibitions offered not simply an experience of the semblance of clothes but also potentially suggested how clothes could be revealed and known in more intimate readings.

I found the project suggested ways the fashion exhibition could connect with everyday experiences and convey a diverse set of clothing relationships. This model showed how the museum might operate under a less restrictive regime and how it might express shifting forms of transience and momentary encounters.

In developing the exhibitions I collaborated with a number of people and practices that assisted in the realisation of this project. These museum collaborations enabled me to leave behind and shed my habitual practices. Through these interventions I challenged the capacity for fashion in the museum to question the nature of things and communicate connectedness to life.





## EXHIBITION INDEX

The exhibitions listed below informed the project or are cited in the text.

*Andy Warhol's "Folk and funk"*

Museum of American Folk Art, New York

20 September -19 November 1977

Brant, S, & Cullman, E (curators)

*AngloMania: Tradition and transgression in British fashion*

Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

3 May -4 September 2006

Bolton, A (curator)

*Backstage: selection 1*

MoMu, Modemuseum, Antwerp

21 September 2002-4 April 2003

Verhelst, B (curator)

*Bless no 00-no 29 retrospective home run*

Museum Boijmans van Beuningen, Rotterdam

30 April -9 July 2006

te Duits, Thimo (curator)

*blog.mode: addressing fashion*

Costume Institute, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

18 December-13 April 2008

Bolton, A & Koda, H (curators)

*Dangerous liaisons: fashion & furniture in the 18th century*

Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

26 April- 8 August 2004

Koda, H & Bolton, A (curators)

*Dressed to the eyes: the fashions of Hall Ludlow*

RMIT Gallery, Melbourne

16 March-30 April 2005

Healy, R & Masters, D (curators)

*Elite elegance: couture fashion in the 1950s*

ROM, Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto

23 November 2002-4 May 2003

Palmer, A (curator)

*Emotions*

Mode2001 Landed-Geland, Antwerp

Police tower Oudaan

26 May-7 October 2001

Van Beirendonck, W (curator)

*Fabulous: exquisite Melbourne fashions of the '60s*

National Trust of Australia (Victoria)

Como House and Garden, South Yarra

25 May-13 November 2005

Anya-Petrivna, E & Symons, K (curators)

*Fashion and fancy dress: The Messel family dress collection 1865-2005*

Brighton Museum and Art Gallery

22 October 2005-16 July 2006

Taylor, L, Thompson, E & de la Haye, A (curators)

*Fashion at Belsay (FAB)*

Belsay Hall, Castle and Gardens, Northumberland

29 May-30 September 2004

King, J, & Postlethwaite, S (curators)

*Gianni Versace*

Costume Institute, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

11 December 11-22 March 1998

Martin, R (curator)

*Gianni Versace: The retrospective 1982-1997*

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

16 November 2000-4 February 2001

Healy, R (curator)

*House mix: highlights of the International fashion and textiles collection*

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

4 December 2003-29 August 2004

Healy, R (curator)

*Hussein Chalayan, 10 years work*

Groninger Museum, Groningen, Netherlands

17 April-4 September 2005

Van der Zijpp, S (curator)

*Invitation No 75. fashion, art, design*

Stedelijk Museum Bureau, Amsterdam

30 July-31 August 2003

Van der Heide, B (curator)

*Issey Miyake making things*

Cartier Foundation for Contemporary Art, Paris

13 October 1998-28 February 1999

ACE gallery, New York, 13 November 1999-

29 February 2000

Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo 29 April-

20 August 2000

Issey Miyake studio (curatorial direction)

*Jacqueline Kennedy: The White House years selections from the John. F. Kennedy Library and Museum*

Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

1 May-29 July 2001

Bowles, H (curatorial consultant)

*Magic village, COSMIC WONDER*

Mu Eindhoven, Netherlands

11 June-10 July 2005

Maeda, Y (artistic direction)

*Malign Muses: When fashion turns back*

MoMu, Modemuseum, Antwerp

18 September 2004-30 January 2005

Retitled *Spectres: When fashion turns back* V&A, London

24 February-8 May 2005

Clark, J (curator)

*Maison Martin Margiela (9/4/1615)*

Museum Boijmans van Beuningen, Rotterdam

11 June-17 August 1997

te Duits, T (curator)

*Melbourne memories*

National Trust of Australia (Victoria)

Westfield Southland shopping centre

16-28 May 1994

Ridsdale, G (curator)

*Pain couture by Jean Paul Gaultier*

Cartier Foundation for Contemporary Art, Paris

6 June-10 October 2004

Gaultier, JP (designer/curator)

*Radical fashion*

V&A, London

18 October 2001-6 January 2002

Wilcox, C (curator)

*Raid the icebox 1, with Andy Warhol*

Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design

April 23-June 30 1970

Warhol, A (artist/curator)

*Rock style*

Costume Institute, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

9 December 1999 -19 March 2000

Walker, M (curator)

*Skin & bones: Parallel practices in fashion & architecture*

MOCA, Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles

19 November 2006-5 March 2007

National Art Center, Tokyo

6 June-13 August 2007

Embankment galleries, Somerset House

24 April-August 10 2008

Hodge, B (curator)

*Spare room*

Historic Houses Trust of NSW

Elizabeth Bay House, Sydney

11 July-23 September 2007

Carlin, S (curator)

*The corset: fashioning the body*

Museum at FIT, New York

25 January-22 April 2000

Steele, V (curator)

*The new dressing: Japanese fashion of the 80s*

National Gallery of Australia, Drill Hall Canberra

21 November 1987-14 February 1988

Healy, R (curator)

*The world of Balenciaga*

Costume Institute, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

March 23-June 30 1973

Vreeland, D (curator)

*Twister: The celebrated, ingenious and exotic in fashion*

Ian Potter Centre: NGV Australia

28 November 2002-9 February 2003

Somerville, K (curator)

*Valentino in Rome, 45 years of style*

Ara Pacis Museum, Rome

8 July-28 October 2007

Kinmonth, P (curator)

*Versace at the V&A*

17 October 2002-12 January 2003

V&A, London

Wilcox, C (curator)

*Yohji Yamamoto correspondences*

Gallery of Modern Art, Palazzo Pitti, Florence

13 January -6 March 2005

Nihei, M (artistic concept)

*Yohji Yamamoto. Dream shop*

MoMu, Modemuseum, Antwerp

7 March -13 June 2006

Nihei, M (artistic concept)

*Yohji Yamamoto, just clothes (juste des vêtements),*

Musée de la Mode du Textile, Paris

13 April-28 August 2005

Nihei, M (artistic concept), Saillard, O (curator)

*Yves Saint Laurent*

Costume Institute, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

14 December 1983-2 September 1984

Vreeland, D (curator)

## DESIGNER INDEX

Designers and design houses specifically mentioned  
in the text

BALENCIAGA, Paris est. 1937

Cristobal Balenciaga, Spain 1895-1972

BLESS, Berlin, Paris est. 1997

Iness Kaag, Germany born 1970

Desirée Heiss, Germany (Austrian) born 1971

COSMIC WONDER, est. 1999 Osaka Japan

Yukinori Maeda, Japan born 1971

COSMIC WONDER Light Source est. 2007

GIANNI VERSACE, Milan est. 1978

Gianni Versace born Italy 1946,

died United States 1997

HALL LUDLOW, Melbourne 1948-1960

Hall Ludlow born New Zealand 1919,

died Australia 2003

HUSSEIN CHALAYAN, London

est. 1995

Hussein Chalayan

Turkey born 1970 to England 1982

JEAN PAUL GAULTIER, Paris est. 1976

Jean Paul GAULTIER, designer

France born 1952

MAISON MARTIN MARGIELA, Paris est. 1989

Martin MARGIELA, designer

Belgium born 1957

MIYAKE STUDIO, Tokyo est. 1971

Issey Miyake, designer

Japan born 1936

SIX, Melbourne est. 1994

Denise Sprynskyj, Australia born 1960

Peter Boyd, Australia born 1971

UNDERCOVER, Tokyo est. 1993

Jun Takahashi, Japan born 1969

VALENTINO, Rome

Valentino Garavani born Italy 1932

LET IT ROCK, London 1971-1972

TOO FAST TO LIVE TOO YOUNG TO DIE,

London 1972-1974

SEX, London 1974-1976

SEDITIONARIES, London 1976-1978

WORLD'S END, London 1981-1984

Vivienne Westwood England born 1941

Malcolm McLaren England born 1946

YOHJI YAMAMOTO, Tokyo est. 1977

Yohji Yamamoto Japan born 1943

YVES SAINT LAURENT, Paris est. 1962

Yves Saint Laurent, France

1962-2008



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